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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a project aimed at redressing the neglect of American drama in college and secondary school programs in drama, American literature, and American studies, this booklet provides primary and secondary source materials to assist teachers and students in the study of James K. Paulding's nineteenth century comedy, "The Lion of the West." The first part of the booklet contains (1) a discussion of the Yankee theatre, plays written around a character embodying uniquely American characteristics and featuring specialist American actors; (2) a review of the genesis of the play; (3) its production history; (4) plot summaries of its various versions; (5) its early reviews; (6) biographies of actors appearing in various productions; and (7) a discussion of acting in period plays. The second part of the booklet deals with the real people depicted in the play, specifically Davy Crockett and Mrs. Frances Trollope. In addition, this section discusses the place of the play in American literary history and offers questions to promote class discussion. (FL)

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"That time will assuredly come when that same freedom of thought and action which has given such a spur to our genius in other respects will achieve similar wonders in literature. It is then that our early specimins will be sought after with avidity, and that those who led the way in the rugged discouraging path will be honoured as we begin to honour the adventurous spirits who first sought, explored, and cleared this western wilderness."

James K. Paulding

A SOURCEBOOK OF INTERDISCIPLINARY MATERIALS IN AMERICAN DRAMA:

J. K. Paulding, *The Lion of the West*

Edited by Vera M. Jiji

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INTRODUCTION: To the Reader

Like any art form, the drama reflects, dissects, and frequently affects the culture of which it is a part. This is as true of the plays performed in nineteenth century America as in this century. However, while many people today know of Death of a Salesman, or can recall the desperate, haunted heroine of A Streetcar Named Desire, or more recently, the two roommates in The Odd Couple, they would be hard pressed to name a native American play of the nineteenth century, much less a major character in it. Yet such plays not only existed, they flourished. The purpose of CULTURE AT PLAY: MULTIMEDIA STUDIES IN AMERICAN DRAMA is to showcase neglected dramas from the American past so that you may study them for what they are: revelations in some ways of eternal human qualities, yes, but primarily of Americans as they saw themselves at a particular historical moment, and interpreted their actions both to themselves and to others.

The play that has been chosen here is The Lion of the West. Written in 1831 by J. R. Paulding, a brother-in-law of the novelist Washington Irving, it is a typically American comedy about a bogus English lord who attempts to marry a young American heiress for her money. Luckily, the young woman's country cousin, Colonel Nimrod Wildfire (the lion of the title), rescues her from the fortune hunter's clutches. But while this main plot is developing, the real interest and substance of the play centers on the sub-plot: the Colonel's New York encounter with Mrs. Wollope, an English woman of refinement, whose self-appointed task is to transport "culture" to the colonies and to rugged frontiersmen like the Colonel.

To aid your study of this play, this sourcebook has been assembled. In it you will find such primary source materials as pictures of some of the actors who performed in early productions of The Lion of the West, stage designs of the period, actual reviews of performances here and in England, contemporary descriptions of the acting styles of the principals (with biographical bits, too), and what the playwright and the star had to say about their vehicle.

In addition, since The Lion of the West parodies two real and historically prominent people: the Englishwoman, Mrs. Frances Trollope, author of a celebrated book about the American character based on her travels in this country, and the frontiersman, Davy Crockett, parts of her Domestic Manners of the Americans are excerpted along with some of his autographical statements (contained in the article about him).

This sourcebook also contains some secondary resource material concerning various aspects of the play. Don't try to read it from beginning to end. Each article is self-contained, and treats the play from a different angle, so browse through it, getting a sense of the various approaches. Reflecting the editor's bias, these are interdisciplinary—historical, biographical, cultural, literary, and theatrical. Remember that we want to help you see the play in its complexity. Even though your course work may be more specialized, we hope you will enjoy this holistic study of The Lion of the West.*

**Vera Jiji has written this introduction, as well as all unsigned articles in this source book.*

Scene from The Contrast (1787)

YANKEE THEATRE

Marilyn Miller

When Royall Tyler completed his play The Contrast in 1787, little did he know that he was introducing a character--Yankee Jonathan--who, in his various incarnations, would dominate American theatre for much of the next century. Jonathan's stage entrance also made another kind of history in that he became the first in an uninterrupted line of folkloric characters--among them, backwoodsman Nimrod Wildfire, riverboatman Mike Fink, city-Irish firefighter Mose, and lumberman Paul Bunyan--who appeared on the American stage. And not only was he the first, but because he seemed to summarize the American character to Americans themselves, he became, until the twentieth century, the most important of these Yankee stage presences. The numerous plays written around the character of Yankee Jonathan performed by specialist American actors constitute what theatre historians now call Yankee theatre.[1] Moreover the evolution of his character throughout the period of his ascendency discloses much about the shifting values, preoccupations, and self-appraisals of Americans.

The significance of Yankee Jonathan does not end here. For not only did he inspire American playwrights, he radically altered the relationship between American and English actors; before him, the only actors who counted on the American stage were English; after him, American actors, at least in comedy, dominated their own theatres. How these changes were accomplished makes a fascinating story. But first, who was Yankee Jonathan? Initially, he appeared as a young boy or man from the country, wearing rustic dress, and speaking in a New England dialect. This early Jonathan displayed independence, an earthy sense of humor, and a simplicity of manner that masked a cunning intelligence. Although in later versions, he might grow old, be a sharp dealer and have different occupations (storekeeper, peddlar, etc.), he would retain the characteristics he received at birth.

After The Contrast two plays written by New Englanders are important in tracing the development of Yankee theatre: David Humphreys' The Yankee in England (c. 1815) and Samuel

Woodworth's The Forest Rose (1825). The contribution of The Yankee in England lies not in what happens onstage but in Humphreys' notes on the real life Yankee and his seven-page glossary of Yankee terms appended to the text. These were to be used by subsequent Yankee authors as a reference in constructing their own plays. In contrast, the play itself is the thing in The Forest Rose; its plot becomes the model for all the Yankee plays that follow. The Forest Rose is notable, too, for its production marks the first time an American actor appears as a Yankee in a fully developed play.

Meanwhile, a year earlier in London, the famous English comedian Charles Mathews presented a one-man satirical show, A Trip to America, based on his experiences as a travelling actor. Essentially, A Trip to America was a series of character sketches of native American types, one of whom was Jonathan W. Doubikin, a "real Yankee," whom Mathews defined as "what you may call an American and of course an American is what you must call a Yankee." Approximately five months later, Mathews presented more of his impressions of American life, this time in play form. Whereas his earlier sketches had poked good-natured fun at American foibles, this second piece, Jonathan in America, was more sharply critical, so much so that Americans were outraged by it, and Mathews, responding to their consternation, never played in it again. What had so outraged the Americans was a Yankee character who, in addition to being an uncouth braggart, lacked wit, honesty, or manners, and moreover, acted cruelly to Negroes.

In his two portrayals of Americans (and as such the Yankee character), Mathews, a brilliant mime, led to the next stage in the development of the Yankee character, for one American, at least, was following what he did closely. That man was the actor James Hackett (1800-1871). Between 1826 and 1836 Hackett became the preeminent interpreter of the Yankee. Almost single-handedly, he established this character as the most significant American type on the stage. In doing so, he made it possible for American actors to assume roles on the stages in their own country. (Previously, English actors had monopolized the American theatre.) By searching for new talent to write plays for his new character or by writing them himself Hackett also in effect founded Yankee theatre. In the period between 1827 and 1832, he introduced eight new pieces, five of them featuring the Yankee including The Lion of the West. In Hackett's hands, the character shows native wit, bargains skillfully, tells exaggerated stories, and disregards vested authority. Hackett had large ambitions; what he was after was nothing less than to define the American character, to reveal the fabric of his own society.

The times were auspicious for such an attempt. A new theatre-going audience, composed of industrial workers in the cities, was listening; in addition, because of western expansion, new theatres had sprung up, and since actors were needed to perform in them, American actors finally had a chance. Moreover, certain newspapers like The New York Mirror and its editor, General Morris, actively encouraged the establishment of an independent American theatre.

Having made this breakthrough, Hackett moved on to dialect comedy. One reason for his stepping aside was that another actor had begun to compete for the Yankee role; the young actor's name was George Hill (1809-1849) or, as he was later called, Yankee Hill. The difference between Hackett and Hill reveals where Yankee theatre was going. All along Hackett had been interested in rooting out the American character, partly in order to assert artistic and intellectual independence from England. His approach, based on Mathews, had been somewhat satiric. In contrast, Hill presented a warm, gentle, sentimental portrait of the Yankee. Also, as a New Englander himself (Hackett was not), Hill based his character on personal affinity and close observation; thus he represented a style of acting just coming into vogue on both sides of the Atlantic, which, modelled on everyday life, had as its basis a new naturalism.

During the peak of his career, between 1832-1848, Hill played only the Yankee. At the end of this time he had brought forty Yankee pieces to the stage, made prominent the art of Yankee storytelling, and won prestige in England for the American actor. By 1848, however, Hill's star had begun to decline. Throughout the 1840's, Danforth Marble's western Yankee gradually took over the theatergoer's imagination.

In the twenty Yankee characters he created, his broad, simply stated comic figure is a clever, sometimes sly, practical joker. And when Marble brought his creation to England, the critics there applauded his broader acting style, also seeing in his open freshness, the rugged individualism of the West.

Like Hill, Marble died a relatively young man. His place was taken by the next big star of Yankee theatre, Joshua Silsbee (1813-1855), who held center stage during the 1850's. Silsbee's success mirrors the decline of the Yankee character. Unlike his predecessors, he neither added any new Yankee character nor any play to the existing repetoire. And in his portrayal of the Yankee, he seems to have broadened, without any deepening, Marble's already wide interpretation. With Silsbee, the Yankee grows even larger than life and more unctuous. Perhaps there was really nothing more to be added, for when he dies, the most vital period of Yankee theatre also departs the stage.

Ten years earlier an event had occurred which foreshadowed its demise. In 1845 Anna Cora Mowatt had written, Fashion, or Life in New York. Without dialect or Yankeeisms, Mrs. Mowatt had caricatured the city, but her hero, the farmer Alan Trueman, is simple and straightforward, and unlike other Yankee characters, he comes from a higher level of country life. Fashion signaled that there would be a new comedy, reflecting and appealing to the new middle-class audience in the cities. Throughout the fifties and the sixties, this audience would increase, and the middle-class comedy it applauded would chart the direction of American theatre during the next two decades.

In various guises, however, the Yankee character remained on stage - as Gumption Cute in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), Salem Scudder in The Octoroon (1857) and Solon Shingle in The People's Lawyer (popular in the 1860's). Split into the low comic peddler as Joe Fletcher in James A. Herne's Margaret Fleming (1891) and the higher stalwart Uncle Nat Berry in his Shore Acres (1892), the Yankee character survived into the twentieth century. We leave it to our readers to determine whether that peculiar combination of shrewd "common" sense and "innocent" rambunctiousness has yet disappeared from the American scene.

DRAMATIC FORM

The Genesis of the Play:

In 1830 the actor-manager James Hackett advertised his first Prize Play Contest. Hackett, one of the actor-managers who dominated the American stage in the early nineteenth century, offered $250 for a three act comedy in which a major character was to be a native American. Two plays were submitted, and Hackett chose The Lion of the West as the winner.

Both playwright and sponsor proved lucky, for the result of their combined effort was a play that happily wedded the spirit of the age, the goals and temperament of the playwright, and the theatrical needs of the star to produce an indigenous, idiosyncratic, and congenial comedy-farce.

The spirit of the age was youthfully optimistic. Self-confident and seeking to establish their intellectual independence from the mother country, Americans were in a generally self-aggrandizing mood. The country's territorial expansionism found a counterpart in the boasts of Nimrod Wildfire; its naive assumptions that the land would yield unlimited largesse had an echo in Nimrod's generosity. These traits were presented positively, and the effect was that the patriotic Kentucy Colonel, conquerer of the Indians and the wilderness, represented America to itself as it wished to be seen. (Since the play did not do as well on tour in the western states as elsewhere, it would seem that Nimrod was too broad a caricature for westerners to accept.) For the English, however, and even some of the eastern theatre-going public, Nimrod was a "foreign" exotic, yet with his good-natured, spontaneous liveliness and expansiveness, he was a folk hero who came to be seen as quintessentially American.

The Dramatic Past:

When The Lion of the West was written, American playwrights were still imitating English models. At the time, English comedy was infused with the democratic spirit. This was in contrast to the previous genre, the brilliantly sardonic Restoration comedy, which, because it catered to a small, aristocratic audience, assumed that large fortunes, titles, great wit, and style were essential to life. In contrast, the basically democratic Georgian comedy was written to appeal to the huge audiences needed to fill the new Convent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. These theatres held 3013 and 3611 patrons respectively in the eighteenth century.[1]

Two theatres of the time: compare this huge Covent Garden theatre to the American one, p.8

Nineteenth Century Theatre:

Thus comedies appealed to a middle-class morality. "Ridicule," cautioned the English critic Richard Steele, "should be good natured, directed at the singularities of essentially lovable people." The most popular dramatic form during the eighteenth century was sentimental comedy. Gradually, as the century wore on, the plots became mere vehicles, and audience interest lay in the star performers' repertoire and stage presence. As a result, stereotype characters became more prevalent and, by the nineteenth century, the most successful comedy was Colman the Younger's John Bull; or An Englishman's Fire-side (1803), which became standard repertory fare. In this popular play, "Colman contrasts a pre-occupation with status and wealth on the part of pseudo-fashionable London with the perenially sound values of the English country hearth and home, throwing in for good measure the charm and whimisical generosity of the Irish."[2] The parallels to Paulding's play are self-evident.

The Script:

Luckily for this project, the English stage differed significantly from the American in at least one respect: in England, due to censorship, all plays had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office. Thus when Hackett took his American hit to London in 1833, he filed a copy as required, and this version is the one recovered by James Tidwell (see his introduction to the play text). American plays were not subject to such scrutiny. Therefore, no script of an American play of this period is likely to be accurate or complete, Why? Because the actor treated his anecdotes in commedia dell' arte fashion—improvising, extending lines, speeches, and bits which made a hit with the audience, and also substituting local references; in short, he reworked his material much as a modern stand-up comic might do. However, the basic character remained the same, no matter how the actor managed the lines, or even how the playwright changed the script.

Having summaries* of the plots of the first two versions of The Lion of the West enables us to observe the changing dramatic fashions. The plots, characters, and even moods of the various versions differ significantly, although the hero retains his personality and style.

The First Version:

Relying on the ultimate capitulation of the heroine to a code of submission to parental authority, the first version is the most sentimental. From its plot summary, it appears to be closer to the third than to the second version. Cecilia Bramble is comparable to Caroline Freeman; both are marriageable heiresses courted by several men, one of whom is a fake nobleman only after money. (That in the first version he is French rather than English seems a minor point.) Also, in both versions Wildfire is the ingenue's visiting cousin. And in each version he challenges the villain to a duel with rifles, exposing the so-called count's cowardice. Runaway horses, a fancy ball, the planned

elopement (almost an abduction, since the Count is a swindler), the cries of "murder! fire!" by the comic Mr. Higgins, a foil to Count de Crillon (an ancestor of Mrs. Wollope, it would seem), add to the similarities. Francis Hodge speculated before Tidwell's discovery that Bernard's version was closer to "an earlier Hackett piece done in December, 1829, which was called The Times, or, Life in New York."[3] The cast list of that play supports this contention, including as it does:

Industrious Doolittle, a Scheming Yankee
Mr. Traffic, a Wealthy New York Merchant
Percival, an English Merchant
Sir Croesus Mushroom, an English Traveller
Mr. Pompey, a Dandy Negro Waiter
Caroline, a Rich Heiress
Mrs. Traffic, the Merchant's Wife
Mons. Ragout, Valet de Chambre
Charles Barton
Sly Hazard
Amelia, Traffic's Daughter
Mrs. Jenkins

It is a happy coincidence that Mrs. Wollope's first name should be "Amelia," since she is always talking of "amelioration," that Mrs. Trollope should have relied heavily on this word and thus be correctly parodied in this respect, and that the name should have been used already by Hackett in the 1829 play. Such are the mysteries of artistic creation.

The Second Version:

As Wildfire was a success, while the play itself was not, Hackett approached John Augustus Stone to supply a "plot less simply constructed."

Again we have a marriageable heiress, a fortune-hunting "Lord," a comic Englishwoman, a duel, an attempted abduction, a dancing scene for Nimrod, and a happy ending. But the tone of the piece is markedly changed in its second incarnation; it has become a melodrama.

Form: Perhaps because melodrama had become the favored genre of the early nineteenth century, it was decided that in its second version, the Lion of the West should return as one also. Originally referring to the use of music throughout the production to enhance emotional effect, the term came to mean the species of drama in which events take a striking or spectacular turn, with the outcome uncertain. Yet in melodrama the ultimate resolution is always in favor of the virtuous, who also undergo no character development, since the good and the evil characters are clearly opposed from the beginning. By definition, the melodramatic form is ethical, but its appeal lies in presentation of moments of high emotion, combined with the expectation of a happy ending. As such, it is just the sort of drama which a lower class audience finds satisfying.[4]

Stone's revision creates a melodrama by playing with such staples of the genre as a wounded soldier, a motherless babe, an honest but poor young man deprived of his chance in life by a villain, etc. Nimrod's presence in the play seems almost incidental—there is so much else going on.

In contrast, William Bayle Bernard's revision is constructed with admirable economy and, in addition, skillfully uses the stock comic elements.

The Third Version:

In its third version, the play is technically a farce; that is, it depends for effect more upon the physical action and stock comic situations which occur from the encounters of the stereotypical characters than from the development of the play's action or the complexity of individualized character. What is still emphasized, however, is the new type of character which Paulding had created.

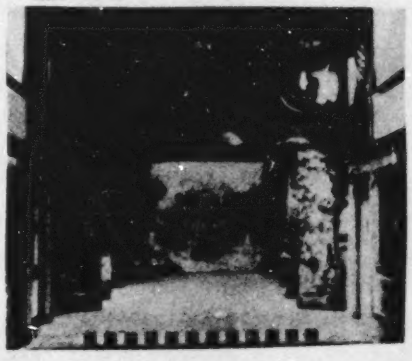
Plot Interest:

Among the by now familiar comic devices are the tag names (Freeman and Wollope) to indicate the characters' significance or nature, the ridicule of pseudonoble foreigners, the false identity, the comic duel and the party dance scene. Apparently new is the misunderstood letter and the deliberate use of stock villainy and melodrama for humor (as in "Then, my dear brother, shoot him instantly," and "Who's that coming up the stairs?").

Most notable in Bernard's revision, however, is the way in which the main plot and subplot comment indirectly on each other. Thus the conventional comic plot, which ends in the marriage plans of the young couple, is contrasted with Minrod's proposal to Mrs. Wollope. Similarly, the play's theme, which has involved the unmasking of a pretended nobleman in each of the three versions, now uses Mrs. Wollope's pet "project," "the refinement of American manners," to raise the fundamental question of what constitutes "true" refinement or nobility. Surely Nimrod's generosity, warmth, and spontaneous good humor constitute the nobility of nature's gentleman, as Americans wished to see it.[5]

But the characterization of Nimrod and Mrs. Wollope is more interesting than this abstract opposition suggests, and much of the humor comes from the deep clash of cultures, not merely from the superficial matter of manners or linguistic styles.

Moreover, is it possible that, just as Nimrod admires Mrs. Wollope and seems ready to marry her, she is more fascinated by him than she might be willing to admit? For example, she swallows all his tall tales (echoing the unfortunate Mrs. Trollope who prints wild stories in Domestic Manners as if they were her own eyewitness accounts). And she seems ready to stay in this "uncivilized" country until told that the Americans will not subscribe to her Academy. Most telling is her plan to "lead him [i.e., Wildfire] as I please." Surely the mutual attraction of the lady of



Compare this American Theatre to the English one, p.4.

refinement and the man of nature is as perennial a theme as is the unmasking of the villain's true identity.

Perhaps it was because Paulding, Hackett, and Bernard had Crockett and Mrs. Trollope available as models that Wildfire and Mrs. Wollope spring to life, but they seem far more than stock creations. I would have to agree that the characters other than these two lack any personality, but the reprinted Times review of April 13, 1833, seems too harsh in its judgment that Mrs. Wollope is "very feebly managed."

As for Nimrod, he refuses to fit any stereotypes we might have associated with his plot situation. It would have been hardly surprising to find in him something of a braggart soldier, like the Falstaff for which Hackett was best known, but Nimrod doesn't fit the mold; he's not a coward. Nor is he a trickster who gets what he wants by dishonesty and slyness. It is tempting to see him as an id figure, as he is so full of spontaneous good spirits and energy, but his generosity to others and willingness to accept his uncle's correction evade that classification.

Rather, we must conclude that Nimrod Wildfire, like other stage Yankees, is an indigenous creation. That he has had numberless imitators and can still set us to laughing is perhaps the best substantion of his significance and that of this landmark American drama, as well.

PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE LION OF THE WEST

The production history of this play has been carefully detailed in two scholarly articles: the first by Nelson F. Adkins called "James K. Paulding's The Lion of the West," American Literature, III (November, 1931), 249-258, and the second by Francis Hodge called "Biography of a Lost Play," Theatre Annual, 14 (1954), 48-61. Since both articles were written before the recovery of the lost text, some space in each was devoted to explaining the play's importance, bewailing its loss, trying to reconstruct it from quotes and the summaries available of the first two versions, and detailing Hackett's success with it.

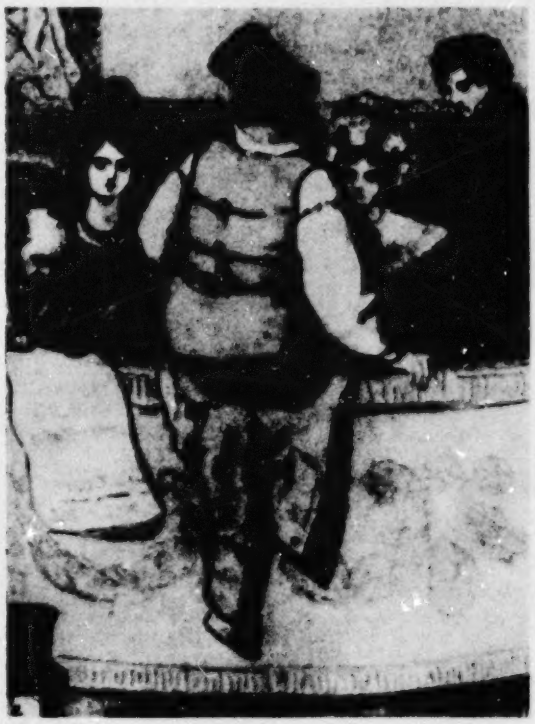
A few of these details are worth noting. Adkins quotes liberally from the original reviews (samples of which are shown below). He discloses that Hackett received "an average [box-office take] exceeding nine hundred dollars [a night], a circumstance we believe unprecedented in the history of any comedy produced on our stage"[1] in November of 1831. Adkins' admirably thorough research also revealed that the play "so incensed the 'half-horse, half-aligator [sic] boys,' 'the yellow flowers of the forest, as the [sic] call themselves, that they threatened 'to row him up Salt River,' if he ventured a repetition of the objectionable performance."[2]

Hodge speculates on Hackett's role in emphasizing Wildfire's resemblance to Crockett. Just as in our own day, when any fictionalized treatment of a famous political personality gains in popularity as people recognize its resemblance to the "real life" source, so the play gained from the "rumor," which spread on the road tour. "Had Hackett a hand in this?" asks Hodge, reporting that "Hackett was an opportunist."[3]

Hodge also discusses the English reception of the play, noting that "For the first time an American actor had been received without snobbishness and a coldly critical comparison with British stage luminaries. This was a significant victory not only for Hackett but for The Kentuckian as well."[4] . . . "Colonel Nimrod Wildfire . . . won many valuable friends for America. Hackett, the American comedian extraordinary, was our first theatrical ambassador of good will."[5]

Citing the enthusiasm for the play over its long stage life, Hodge concludes that "The wild independence of this homebred Westerner was in the air, for he was an expression of Jacksonian democracy. He was America . . . and in him the new raw-boned, hard-working men of the lower classes, who were beginning to come to the theatre, saw something of themselves, and they stayed to laugh and admire."[6]

Not everyone admired Nimrod Wildfire, as a reading of the reviews from England reproduced here will show. It is most interesting in dealing with almost any play to try to determine the writer's attitude toward his or her characters and material, since, unlike the novelist, playwrights cannot ordinarily (there are exceptions) speak directly to the audience to comment on their characters. Thus playwrights assume that the audience's attitudes toward the characters' actions are similar to their own. Only in this way can they provide what T. S. Eliot called the "objective correlative," that is, the stage actions which will "justify" the audience reaction.



"A Box at the Theatre," from Trollope's Domestic Manners . . .shows American audiences' boorishness

To give a minor example, when Nimrod greets Mrs. Wallope by a democractic handshake instead of kissing her hand, we are mildly amused. When he fails to remove his hat in her presence, a modern audience might not even notice the rudeness. It is not until he puts his feet on what should be her seat and sticks the offending (and offensive) hat under her nose that we get the point.

The 1831 audience would have seen his behavior as far more boorish and, therefore more amusing, or more offensive as their own values dictated. Thus Edward Thomas Coke, an English traveler, objectifies his own values and places them in Paulding's mind when he reports that "the play is intended to censure and correct the rough manners of the States west of the Alleghany mountains."[7]

The best way to judge the audience's response to the play, however, is to read the original reviews themselves. We have reprinted a generous sampling of the first two versions.

But the importance of this play should neither be judged on the basis of contemporary reviewers' reactions, nor from Hackett's perspective, nor even entirely on its aesthetic merit. Rather, it should be seen as the forerunner of innumerable plays, movies, and other memorabilia about the American western folk hero; an image that this country has still not outgrown.

PLOT SUMMARIES

Paulding's Lion: The Original Version

The Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, April 27, 1931.

Cecilia Bramble, only daughter of Governor Bramble, a senator, a young lady deeply smitten with admiration of distinguished foreigners, and ardently desirous of visiting Paris. An Heiress [sic], the Count de Crillon, a noted swindler and imposter of that time in Washington, takes advantage of this foible, pays his addresses to her, and being contemptuously rejected by her father, at length inveigles her into an elopement, which is frustrated however by the accidental running away of the horses, and the interference of Roebuck, an ardent and sincere admirer of the young lady. The young gentleman brings her home in a swoon, and keeps her secret.

Cecilia, after a severe struggle between her duty to her father; her newly awakened doubts of the Count, who had behaved in the most cowardly manner when her life was endanged by the running away of the horses; her lurking preference of Roebuck, and her vehement desire to visit Paris, is wrought upon to consent to a second elopement the succeeding night. During the progress of these events, Colonel Nimrod Wildfire, a cousin of Cecilia arrives, and being apprised by Governor Bramble of the addresses of the Count, who he believes to be an impostor, to Cecilia, as well as the young lady's preference, offers his services to detect and expose the adventurer, if he be one, or establish his character, if he be not, by making him either fight or run away, which the Colonel considers an infallible criterion of a gentlemen.

In pursuance of this plan, the Colonel seeks the Count and proffers him battle—at the same time complimenting him with divers odd names. The Count affects not to understand him, but being hard pressed, at length makes a precipitate retreat. The Colonel is then satisfied he is "playing possum."

There is another pretender to Cecilia, a Mr. Higgins, a candidate for a foreign mission, who having publicly pronounced the Count to be an impostor, has excited his wrath in a high degree. Having ascertained that Higgins is as great a poltroon as himself, he takes every opportunity to insult him, treads on his toes at a fancy ball given by one of the foreign ministers, and whispers in his ear, a threat to blow his brains out the first opportunity. In consequence of this, Higgins places a pair of loaded pistols at his bedside that night, which happens to be the night of the second elopement.

When all is quiet, the Count appears groping his way in the dark through the hall of the Hotel where all the parties lodge, and seeing a light through the key-hole of Higgins' chamber, supposes it to be that of Cecilia—he accordingly taps at the door, and finally goes in. A moment after, the report of a pistol is heard followed by a cry of murder! fire!—and the appearance of Higgins, who runs out repeating the cry of murder! fire! and at length falls flat on the floor. The Count follows him hastily, stumbles over him and falls; the inmates of the hotel are alarmed, and rush forth in a great variety of costume, among the rest Cecilia and Pullet, her maid, in their travelling dresses, for the elopment.—These excite the attention and suspicions of Roebuck, the Governor, and the Colonel. The latter, armed with a couple of rifles, proceeds to the chamber of the Count—locks the door—proffers him his choice of weapons—and at length, forces from him a confession of his imposture, and carries him in triumph to confirm it before the young lady and her father. This he does, and is dismissed with contempt by all parties.

The Governor then expresses his regrets that his daughter should have thus rendered herself unworthy the respect of the world, or the affections of a man of honor. Cecilia displays a proper feeling on the occasion; and Roebuck generously defends her, at the same time renewing his addresses. Cecilia declines them for the present, and declares her intentions to do so, until she shall by her future conduct, entitle herself to the confidence of her friends, and the affections of her lover. The piece concludes with an address of the Colonel to the pit.

The piece is interspersed with occasional stories of the Colonel, characteristic of the dialect, manners, and peculiarities, real and supposed, of the people of the new states—or rather, of brave, generous, "Old Kentucky."

Stone's Lion: The Second Version

New-York Mirror, October 1, 1831, p. 102.

Lexington, an officer in the British Army, is desperately wounded at the battle of Lundy's Lane, near the Falls of Niagara, and the following morning is found on the field covered with blood, and apparently dying, by Mr. Peter Bonnybrown, a plain warm-hearted New-England bachelor, at that time serving in the army of the United States. He removes the cloak from the breast of the wounded officer, on which, unconscious of the surrounding horrors, a female infant is quietly reposing. Bonnybrown

conveys the infant to a place of security, and during many years of commercial prosperity, rears and educates Fredonia as his own. She is addressed by many suitors, the most conspicuous and pertinacious of whom is a fortune hunter, known as Lord Luminary, who, in conjunction with Satellite, another adventurer, has been incessant in his endeavors to gain her affections and fortune. Fredonia has nearly reached her eighteenth birth-day [sic], and departs from the seminary of which she has been a distinguished inmate, to visit her guardian, . . .

At this period the play commences. Mr. Bonnybrown, and a dignified relative, who, on all occasions, styles herself "Miss Albina Towertop, late of Towertop Manor House, Hop Hill Park, Kent, England," receives a letter, which announces the apeedy arrival of Mr. B.'s nephew, Nimrod Wildfire, from "Old Kentuck." The exploits of this humorous, unpolished, generous son of the west, contribute largely to the general interest of the comedy, and his sayings and doings aid materially in the development of the plot. Deacon Dogwood, an innkeeper, formerly an itinerant vendor of yankee wares, has ejected from his house a gay, high-minded, and humorous young gentleman, Trueman Casual, who had recently experienced sudden and total reverses of fortune. Defending himself against the sheriff's officers who pursue him, nearly overpowered, he is relieved by the opportune arrival of Nimrod Wildfire, who, in the prosecutor, Dogwood, discovers an old acquaintance and swindler in horse flesh. A promise of restitution on the one part, and silence on the other, effects Casual's liberation from the clutches of Dogwood. Fredonia now arrives at the landing-place at some distance from her guardian's country seat--here she is met by Satellite, who, by the contrivance of Luminary, presents himself as Bonnybrown's footman, and conducts her to a carriage in waiting, which has been procured by Luminary for the purpose of conveying Fredonia to a remote dwelling, with the hope of extorting her consent to their immediate union. This scheme is frustrated by Casual, who stumbles on the adventure, relieves the young lady from her perilous situation, and bears her triumphantly to her guardian's residence, where he is welcomed by the family as the preserver of their ward. Casual and Fredonia have before met in society, and, as in duty bound, now become deeply enamored. Bonnybrown, indignant at the villany of Lord Luminary, prompts Wildfire to redress Fredonia's wrong, which office he undertakes with great alacrity, as "he hadn't found a fight for ten days, and he felt might wolfy about the head and shoulders."

Luminary endeavors to ruin the reputation of Casual, and covertly dislodge him from the place he has gained in the affections of Fredonia, Miss Towertop, and Mr. Bonnybrown. He engages one Coquinard, a Canadian barber-surgeon, to sustain the character of a French nobleman, M. Le Comte Rousillon, who is to present himself as the friend of Mr. B.'s Havre correspondent, and to become the professed admirer of Fredonia. Luminary now forges the certificate of the neighboring magistrate, which sets forth that the bearer (a creature hired for the purpose) is the victim of the arts of Casual, and concludes with cautioning the world against him, as a nameless adventurer, and utterly worthless. The pretended Count Rousillon is introduced to the family in due form. The encounter of Wildfire and Luminary terminates in a challenge from the former, and the festivities of the night are interrupted by the arrival of Luminary's female coadjutor, bearing the forged testimonial. All are in consternation--Casual, astonished and overpowered, hastens to discover his traducer, and to avenge his wrongs.

The events of the night, however, do not prevent Nimrod, who is "primed for anything, from a possum hunt to a nigger funeral," from showing off the extraordinary ball-room accomplishments of a back woodsman, in a manner that defies all gravity.

In the last act, in a scene of uncommon power and interest, Bonnybrown informs Fredonia of the circumstances of her infant days, describes the terrific conflict of Lundy's Lane, and laments the too probable fate of her father.

A quarrel now takes place between Coquinard and Groundling, his associate, this is broken in upon by Wildfire, who, in the presence of all the family, compels him to the disclosure of the whole plot. Tidings are now brought of Casual's sudden departure with arms, and the parties hasten to prevent the expected duel. It is too late--Lord Luminary and Casual have met--the former has fled, the latter is slightly wounded. The report of fire-arms has drawn to the scene an English traveller, whose coach was passing at the time. It is lieutenant, now Major Lexington, the father of Fredonia, who has returned, after long foreign service, in search of his child. A highly wrought scene between Major Lexington and Casual, ends in the conviction, in the mind of the former, that Fredonia is his daughter--her arrival with the others confirms it--and Fredonia is restored by Bonnybrown to that breast, from which he had humanely taken her on the bloody field of Lundy's Lane.

The confession of Dogwood now solves the mystery of Casual's birth,--my Lord Luminary and his associates are duly provided for and the group is made perfectly happy by the arrival of Nimrod Wildfire, Esq. and his amiable (intended) lady "Miss Patty Snag of Salt Licks"-- and, to use the words of the delighted Kentuckian, "there's no back out in her breed, for she can lick her weight in wild cats, and she shot a bear at nine years old."

Casual, Bonnybrown, Luminary, Satellite, Scum, Dogwood, Miss Towertop, and Fredonia, are additions by Mr. Stone and the Kentuckian remains as originally drawn by the author for Mr. Hackett.

EARLY REVIEWS: Reviews of First Version

Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer. April 27, 1831.

"Paulding's comedy--Lion of the West--. . . This production of our distinguished townsman was brought out of the Park Theatre before an extremely crowded house on Monday evening last. The city is at present full of Western merchants, strangers from Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio and the contingent states. They crowded to the theatre on the night in question and received with great applause the successful hits of the author and the actor. Curiosity was considerably excited and from all that we heard and saw, it was fully and emphatically gratified. . . .

Colonel Wildfire . . . [is] an extremely racy representation of Western blood, a perfect non-pareil, half steamboat, half alligator and etc. [He] possesses many original traits which never before have appeared on the stage . . .

The amusing extravagances and strange features of character which have grown up in the western states are perhaps unique in the world itself. . . . [Wildfire is] calm and dignified as a hero which he feels himself to be. It is the odd contrast between dignity and calmness of demeanor, and the high flights of Western fancy that marks the Western original.

Of the play itself . . . we cannot speak too highly of it. Possessing all of the peculiar points, wit, sarcasm and brilliancy of Paulding, it shows him in a quite pleasing light--that of a successful delineator of native manners and indigenous character. There are materials enough in this wide country to construct a school of comedy peculiarly our own. Why not collect them? Mr. Paulding has set an example worthy of being followed up."

James H. Hackett as Nimrod Wildfire, a role modeled on heroic backwoodsmen like Davy Crockett. HTC.

Reviews of Second Version:

Morning Courier, November 11, 1831.
[Entire item as follows]

"Tomorrow night Hackett will appear in "The Lion of the West," when all the world will be in attendance--Expectation is on tip-toe, to see this Eighth wonder of the world."

Morning Courier, November 24, 1831.

"Mr. Hackett's Benefit on Tuesday, was exceedingly well attended, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather. The roaring of the "Lion of the West" was echoed as usual by the audience, and the imitations in the interlude interrupted with constant and deafening thunders of applause.

At the fall of the curtain there was one universal and continuous call kept up for Mr. Hackett, who promptly answered it in propria persona. . . . Mr. Hackett returned thanks for "the indulgence the public had uniformly extended, not only to himself in the personation, but to the inexperienced attempts of our native dramatists in drawing characters indigenous to this country," and concluded by assuring the audience, that "encouraged by their kindness and liberal patronage he should continue his best endeavors to deserve it."

Reviews from England

Morning Courier, April 13, 1833.

"Hackett—London Theatricals—
It is a source of great satisfaction to learn by the recent arrival from Liverpool that our countryman Hackett has been eminently successful in his character of Colo. Nimrod Wildfire."

The Times of the 11th, a paper which always takes the lead in theatricals as in politics, holds the following language in relation to his debut.

COVENT GARDEN

. . . It is difficult for us, on this side of what Colonel Wildfire calls "the big pond," to enter fully into the whim of such a personage; but the oddity of his dialect and the effect of his stories are irresistible. . . . The actor and the character, however, labour under great disadvantages in this farce, which is very clumsy and ineffective. It would have been practicable, without any great effort of ingenuity, to have made the Kentuckian sustain a part properly belonging to the drama: but here the drama is evidently written only for the purpose of bringing him on the stage, and so badly written, that the actor has not the slightest support or relief from the other personages. The plot is the most meagre that can be imagined: the introduction of an English female tourist--a notion which might have been made the vehicle of much good-humoured satire--is very feebly managed, and the other characters have no characters at all. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, and left as he was solely upon his own resources, Mr. Hackett acquitted himself with great credit. . . . He was received with general approbation throughout; at the conclusion of the farce there was some decided hissing, but it appeared to be directed against the play. . . ."

The Morning Herald thus concludes a very favourable critique:

"Mr. Hackett performs his part to the very life. He is a manly-looking fellow with a ruddy brown cheek and an eye of sparkling cheerfulness and spirit . . . He excited much laughter, and the curtain fell among general warm applause, which was continued until Mr. Hackett came forth to announce the repetition of the Kentuckian!!"

Morning Courier, May 1, 1833.

More English reviews . . .

The Athenian speaks of Mr. Hackett's performance in these terms:

"The principal character is Colonel Nimrod Wildfire, a Kentuckian, and it is represented by Mr. Hackett with a degree of ease and spirit which rank him high as an actor, and with such truth and force, that it cannot fail to be greatly amusing to those who have ever met with any of the originals from whom it is drawn; while those who have not, may safely take it upon trust as a genuine portrait. The audience on Saturday took praiseworthy pains to understand the part, and as soon as they did, they relished it much and laughed heartily. Some of the tough Kentuckian stories, as told by Mr. Hackett, have appeared before . . . but

they derive an additional flavour from the good-humoured, clever and characteristic way in which he delivers them. The farce has since been several times repeated with increased success."

The National Standard as follows:

-"COVENT GARDEN.-The Kentuckian, or a Visit to New York, is merely a vehicle for the display of the peculiarities of a genuine 'Kentuck' performed by Mr. Hackett..Mr. Hackett is a true actor; to a genuine spirit of comedy he adds the most perfect selfpossession; but the great excellence of his acting is in its strength, and, if we may use the term, its healthiness; there is nothing financial [sic] in his humor; he does not shrug, and edge, and grimace himself into applause--but all is fair and above-board; he has attained the last triumph of art--he hides it. . . . Mrs. Luminary, 'Mrs. Gibbs,' in whom it was intended to castigate Mrs. Trollope, is very weak; the author should have bitten it in [italics in original] as engravers say, in aqua fortis; whereas the satire is diluted lemon juice . . .

THE PLAYERS

James H. Hackett (1800-71) became an actor after his business ventures had failed and he decided to capitalize on his natural gift for mimickry. The choice was a happy one, and his long, successful theatrical career was studded with local color character types. As the drama critic for The Albion said, "Some of these are really perfect, as for example, his deliciously natural Rip Van Winkle, his impetuous and roaring Nimrod Wildfire and the whole range of his Yankee Genus."[1] In fact the drama critic Robert Grau reported that his Rip Van Winkle was considered superior to Joseph Jefferson's by many critics.[2]

Hackett's first success came as the Yankee, Solomon Swap, so his decision to sponsor a contest for an "original comedy whereof an American should be the leading character" seems to us logical. However, in 1831 the imitation of English models was pervasive, so we should second George Odell who mused, "I wonder if Hackett has received his meed of praise as aider and abettor of the American dramatist?"[3]

At that time, a theatrical property could be taken around the country and even abroad and provide income to the lucky impersonator for a lifetime. Indeed, Hackett played Nimrod to enthusiastic audiences as late as 1862, although by that time "most of [the play's] jokes had lost their point."[4] Perhaps Hackett kept the play unpublished to protect his monopoly. However, the casual treatment of American drama in this country certainly contributed to our almost total loss of this landmark play.[5]

Hackett was considered the finest Falstaff of his time, touring England four times in seven years as the fat knight. He was a theatrical scholar: his notes on Hamlet testify to his careful study, and he initiated the construction of the Shakespeare monument in New York's Central Park.

A vivid description of his acting was given in his obituary in the New York Tribune of December 29, 1871:

> The essence of his conception pointed to a very stern individuality, latent within the humor and the boisterous conviviality of the man--and that, we always thought, was the basis of Mr. Hackett's ideal. With respect to method he was a bold artist. He painted with broad and vigorous strokes and gave little, or no heed to details and delicacy of finish. . . . His greatness consisted in the vigorous illustration of strongly defined eccentric character and the unconscious expression of that everlasting comicality which such characters dispense upon the conduct of life.
> . . . . . .

Actresses: Wheatley and Gibbs

All accounts of the performances of The Lion of the West agree in praising Hackett's acting. The other members of the cast are either merely named, or faulted for their comparative weakness. Odell, for example, after giving the cast list for the Bernard (or third) version as performed in New York remarks "How weak the company! Soon the Mirror will reflect this sentiment, in no very complimentary terms."[1]

In New York, Mrs. Wheatley was our Mrs. Wollope. She had also played the comparable role of Miss Towertop in the John Augustus Stone (or second) version. Here again, both Odell and the Mirror are harsh, the former saying that "The Lion of the West . . . was regarded as unsatisfactory, though Hackett's Colonel Nimrod Wildfire was a genuine contribution to the gallery of American dramatic types."[2]

Mrs. Wheatley, however, is elsewhere enthusiastically described: "For more than twenty years, in the line of comic, middle-aged and old women, rich or poor, refined or vulgar, indeed of every grade, she was entirely unrivalled on the American stage."[3]

In London, Mrs. Wollope, then called Mrs. Luminary, was performed by Mrs. Gibbs, who also won no praise for her role: "Mrs. Luminary, (Mrs. Gibbs,) in whom it was intended to castigate Mrs. Trollope, is very weak; the author should have bitten it in [italics in original] as engravers say, in aquafortis; whereas the satire is diluted lemon juice."[4] The criticism seems to be both of the part as written and as performed by Mrs. Gibbs. However, she, too, was generously praised in a "Memoir of Celebrated Actresses." The anonymous author writes that Mrs. Gibbs "was the best actress in broad comedy--at least, she was equal in that line to Mrs. Davison or Miss Fanny Kelly. Her figure and face especially

qualified her to shine in characters of this description. She was naturally vivacious, and her voice had more of the fulness and jollity of the humour of humble life than either of the two last-named ladies."

"She was pretty well acknowledged to be a very pleasing, if not positively a lovely woman; and, even at the age of sixty, she looked so fresh, young, and comely, that she might have passed, in the eye of a stranger, as one of her own daughters. Mrs. Gibb's professional career was a long one: she remained on the boards till her years numbered more than 'three score years.'"

We may assume that, as the play was written for Hackett's talents, and he availed himself of the age's indulgence for a star's improvisational extravagances, he outshone his partners consistently. Perhaps our age is more willing to give Mrs. Wollope a sympathetic ear. This writer, at any rate, is not so willing to declare Nimrod the only winner as were his contemporaries!

ACTING IN PERIOD PLAYS

Glenn Loney

Just how much historical accuracy should there be in a modern stage production of a play written in--or about-- a different period? If the set and costume designers are striving to recreate the decors, the furniture, the gowns, the headgear of Restoration London, shouldn't the actors then also make the effort to recreate the acting style of that time and place?

The truth is that it would be very difficult for them--even studying letters, diaries, and newspaper reports of the period--to reconstruct the quality and kind of performances which may have distinguished Dryden's All for Love or Congreve's The Way of the World. This is especially true for tragedy, which, by its elevated and refined nature, was not intended to reflect the passions and manners of ordinary men in their daily lives. Comedy, of course, mocking pretension, sham, and folly, allowed humorous exaggeration but was based on an acute observation of the contemporary fashions in dress, attitudes, movements, and manners.

The great plays from the long march of theatre history, works such as Oedipus Rex or King Lear, are generally revived because they still have the power to fascinate audiences with the playwrights' understanding of the complexities of human character and to project those effectively and absorbingly on the stage. They are not forgotten fossils of the drama, exhumed in an archaelogically accurate production.

Even if such an effort were successfully made, how would an average audience know that? Or appreciate it? The chances are that a faithful reconstruction of a Neo-classic French tragedy as produced in Paris in Racine's time would either bore a modern audience--or leave it shaking with helpless laughter at the lofty posing, the elegant attitudes, and the artificial declamation of the poetic text.

Within certain limits, that could also be true of an attempt to recreate a stage-performance style for historic American dramas such as Tyler's The Contrast, Mowatt's Fashion or Boucicault's The Octoroon. As Edwin Duerr points out in his excellent history of performance, The Length and Depth of Acting, much American acting in the nineteenth century was based on training in elocution. The florid style and flamboyance of the politician and the pulpit orator were also at home on the American stage. Not only did elocutionists emphasize the importance of careful articulation, pitch modulations, varied volume, dramatic changes in tempos, artful manipulation of rhythms and accents, and other voice and diction techniques, which were often rather removed from the customs of ordinary speech, but they also urged a system of postures and gestures, keyed to various words and ideas expressing such "emotions" as defiance, dejection, despair, elation, or ecstasy.

One of the most admired American actors in the mid-nineteenth century was Edwin Forrest, noted for his muscular body and his equally muscular playing. By the standards of Stanislavsky and Strasberg, Forrest would have made a fine "Method" actor, since he visited insane asylums to learn how to play insanity. He lived briefly among the Indians when he was to play an Indian chief in Metamora. Reports from his own time often characterized him as "realistic," "natural," "true to life." And yet, if the testimony of some knowledgeable critics is to be believed, Forrest's truth was not to nature, but to the crude, showy traditions of the popular stage, mere conventions of reality, not the thing itself. William Winter said of Forrest: "in moments of simple passion he affected the senses . . . like the ponderous slow-moving, crashing, and thundering surges of the sea." Walt Whitman was not impressed: "an exaggerated, noisy, and inflated style of acting."

What is the point of recreating nineteenth century pulpit or platform oratory, with a rigid system of "expressive" gestures, on the stage today?

Having the villain stroke his moustachios as he prepares to menace a virtuous maiden becomes "camp," comic exaggeration, intended to get laughs from contemporary audiences. In their heydays, however, such plays would have raised chills of fear, cries of rage, and streams of tears from those audiences. The actors were trying to achieve their kind of truth and not just be "hammy." Oddly enough, the old-time melodramas are today most amusing when the performers play them quite seriously, not "pointing," but letting the audiences discover the humor for themselves.

So, in approaching a production of an historic American play, a parody of nineteenth century acting styles is ill-advised. It's a cheap way to get unearned laughs. The comic truth in the playwright's delineation of the characters in such plays as Fashion or The Lion of the West doesn't need parody or "camp." What's more, the contrasts and clashes in the characters—when the rough, boastful frontiersman meets the well-bred society matron, or when the plain-spoken American meets the dandified, self-important European--the comedy implicit in such encounters rings true without any artful business on the part of the actors.

That means that the actors in such plays aim first for the truth in the characters, in the situation, and in the words they speak, the thoughts they express. That does not mean, however, that The Lion of the West on stage today should look just like Grease, only in the clothes of the mid-nineteenth century.

How then do modern actors--especially young ones with little training--manage to give a sense of people, real people, living in

another place and time, without sounding or looking peculiar? One piece of advice is not to watch Dallas for acting models, but instead study some of the British television epics set in other periods. To see British actors recreate the time of Queen Victoria is not to howl with laughter at their ridiculous gestures, rhetorical flourishes, and extremely artificial manners. Quite the opposite: in the best of such shows, somehow the performances seem very natural, thoroughly believable. Yet the characters portrayed clearly represent different values, different attitudes, different manners. What's basic, of course, is the truth the actors have brought to their characterization.

What's different, but right for the period evocation, is the keen awareness of the details of daily life in another time and place. There is clearly a difference in the way a brash, rough frontiersman will walk, stand, gesture, smile and talk—for instance—as opposed to a prim, proper, reserved, and somewhat pretentious dowager. . . .

Young actors, reared in a contemporary society which rejects the class distinctions of the past, are often unaware of what these distinctions were--or how to play them. The best advice, of course, is to study not only the historic play, but also other documents of the time which will help make the people and places real. This includes studying drawings and prints of houses, interiors, costumes, important public events, and the like. If this seems like a lot of extra work, it's nonetheless rewarding to do and will subtly add to the believability of what's achieved on stage.

For some teachers of acting, period style is little more than learning how to use a fan, how to take snuff, how to make a curtsy. Obviously, such things are important, but they are not the core of style—truth is. There is an excellent explanation of acting style in general in F. Cowle Strickland's The Technique of Acting (Chap. 12/McGraw-Hill). Strickland points to some 28 definitions of Style in the Oxford English Dictionary, suggesting that the word can mean many things, even to an actor. Thus, it's not merely a matter of seeming to be ladies and gentlemen of Restoration London nor a Chorus of Elders in ancient Thebes.

Strickland, who directed at Washington's Arena Theatre, prefers a broader application: "the manner of expression characteristic of a particular writer, or of a literary group or period;" that is, the ways in which playwrights communicate their visions of people require specific styles. The style of Arthur Miller in telling the story of Willy Loman is different from that of Neil Simon in telling the story of the odd couple or the red hot lover.

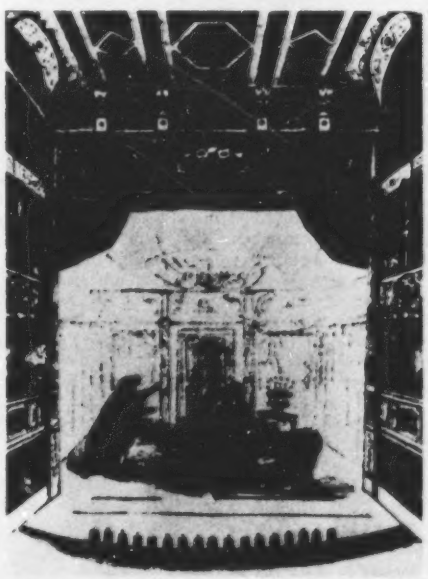
The language of the play is also an important element in the acting style. In nineteenth century American dramas, there is often an elegance, even an artificiality of expression, not to be found today. Polite conversation today is much more direct--even to the point of being impolite. In some nineteenth century plays, however, there is a decorum to be preserved in conversational exchanges, even between people who are obviously angry. If such lines are played as being awkward and old-fashioned, merely words to be rattled off as swiftly as possible so the actors can "get on with the plot," a valuable aspect of period style--and period truth--will have been neglected or sabotaged.

It's a convention of many dramas--serious or comic--before the triumph of stage-realism to have characters confide in the audience, with no one else on stage seeming to hear these "asides." Sometimes a character will give the audience a bit of information they need to know about the past or the future. Often, a character will tell the spectators what he or she feels about what's going on at the moment. The problem for the actor in a period play is to stay in character, develop and maintain this contact with the audience, and avoid being artful or "cute" about it. In a way, especially in a comedy, the playwright seems to have the actor say: "You'll get more out of this scene if you have this bit of important information. I want to share it with you, but the others up here mustn't know I've told you about it!"

What this requires is a clever shifting from a representational style to a presentational one. And back again. In the play, the actor remains the character--he does not become himself as actor--but he briefly interrupts his concentration and involvement with the other characters to relate directly to the audience. It's not easy to do and stay in character. It's also not easy to do and resist the temptation to make a play for the audience's affection and applause as an actor.

The kind of dialogue a playwright gives to each character--even if all the roles are in verse--tells an actor something about a character's mentality, values, background, and similar matters. It's clear from such dialogue differences that New York society matrons of the nineteenth century were nothing like those of today in some of their ways of thinking and speaking. In others, however, they are clearly sisters under the skin--which is one of the charming features of The Lion of the West making it both amusing and understandable even today.

F. Cowles Stickland makes a great point about the environment, the milieu, as a



Wood-engraving, "Balfe's new opera of Geraldine," from Richard Southern, The Victorian Theatre: A Pictorial Survey (New York, 1970).

determinant of acting style in a period play. Not that an actor would want to recreate an eighteenth century performance, however, since at that time, some items of stage-decor--including drapes and furniture--would have been painted on the scenic flats. Painted chairs cannot be sat in. Painted drapes cannot be pulled shut. In a modern production of a period play, though, the conventions of such historic scenery are almost never observed. When they are--as in Sweden's historic Drottningholm Theatre, an authentic eighteenth century playhouse complete with its ancient painted scenes--the actors' jobs are considerably more difficult. They don't have so many real set-props with which to "play."

Costume is another crucial element in creating a sense of another time and place. And costume of course includes costume-props such as fans, lace-handkerchiefs, snuff boxes, lorngettes, mantillas, canes, and the like. Actors need to learn how to "play" such things, once so important in social life. The so-called "language of the fan" is in fact worth learning for period pieces in which fans are to be used. But it's not only fans and canes that are important. The costumes themselves have a lot to do with how a character moves and expresses himself or herself. If an actress is to play a Chinese lady with bound feet, in the time of the Manchus, obviously she won't be romping around the stage like a teen-age tennis-player.

In other times, the costumes of gentlemen and ladies were made in such a way that their wealth, their station, and their leisure were proclaimed. Even in the middle nineteenth century, women of wealth had servants to do their housework, so it was not necessary to have sleeves cut so they could raise their arms over their heads. That means that the cut and confinements of eighteenth and nineteenth century American costumes restricted and restrained certain free-and-easy movements and gestures modern Americans make as a matter of course. In such circumstances, historically accurate costumes—strongly built so actors won't rip the seams—will automatically restrict the performers and give them some feeling of how they have to move in such clothing. Women in bustles; women in hoop-skirts; women in hobble-skirts: all have their movement dictated in several ways by the design of the dresses they wear in such eras of fashion.

There is also something to be learned from the social dances of various periods. The kinds of movements, the degree of delicacy or energy required--all such aspects give clues to characteristic period decorum and manners. An actor's common-sense will tell him a lot about the differences in behaviour, in manner, in reserve or expansiveness, between an 1820 Kentucky woodsman and a Wall Street speculator. One lives in the open, surviving in what is still virtually a wilderness. The other lives in small, enclosed spaces, handsomely decorated--if he's successful.

But the audience's own sense of truth to life needs to be considered. Even if Forrest was extravagant and flamboyant, that's no reason to recreate such a style for your contemporaries, who probably know nothing about nineteenth century American acting and will only think you are clowning or have quite lost your wits.

Scenic Design in the Early American Theatre

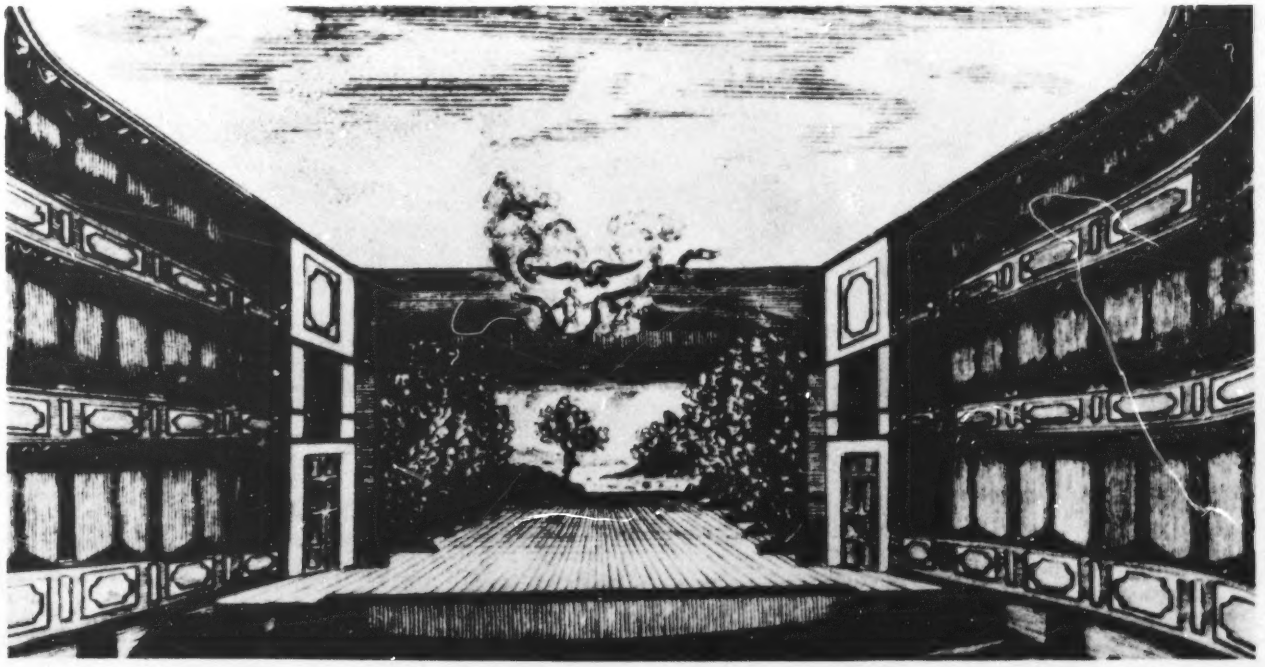
To determine what American scenic design was like in our native theatres involves a good bit of guesswork and use of indirect evidence. There are excellent records of continental and English practices, and much evidence to suggest that whatever was current in England was adopted in our country as soon as possible. It is known, for example, that the British staged plays here during the Revolutionary War for their own amusement. By 1777 Major Andre painted backdrops for a production,[1] and when Wignell and Reinagle opened the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, they arranged to get the latest plays, set designs, and models for their construction sent from London.[2] Mrs. Trollope, too, remarks that "the scenery and machinery [at the Bowery Theatre is] equal to any in London."[3] So it might be useful to study London Theatre practices.

In 1794 when the new Drury Lane opened, we hear rather more about the scenery than the acting. In an early production of Macbeth, after an epilogue "hurled at the Fire Fiend . . . . the curtain was then raised to show the stage turned into a vast lake upon which a man was rowing a boat while a cascade tumbled down at the back."[4] Walter Scott complained in 1819 that "Show and machinery have usurped the place of tragic poetry."[5] Gerald Griggin pointed out that "The managers seek only to fill their houses, and don't care a curse for all the dramatists that ever lived. There is a rage for fire, and water, and horses got abroad."[6]

In this country, too, "from the very beginning of our theatrical history scenery was considered essential to a prosperous enterprise."[7] The earliest American sets were stock flats arranged on each side of the stage as wings, with a scenic backing of two abutted flats ("shutters") which could open like modern sliding doors to reveal another scene behind them. But by 1794, the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia had a backdrop (which could be drawn up into the flies when not needed) and a set-back series of side wings. This method of stage design remained in favor until the late 1800's, although the box set was introduced in England as early as the 1830's.[8]

Scenic design gained rapidly in sophistication, so that, by 1811, when an investigation of a backstage fire caused the details to be documented, we learn that a chandelier on a stage set was raised into the flies with a wick still lit. Thirty-five scenes were hanging there to catch fire! Deliberate fire effects, earthquakes, bridges which collapsed, volcanos and floods also became possible. By 1822, a four-foot-by-fourteen-foot treadmill had been constructed for chariot races and runaway horses.[9]

All these marvelous descriptions create a problem, for the hyperbole associated with modern theatre seems also to have been considered essential from the beginning. In other words, if we judge only by the written descriptions, we will be greatly impressed. In 1806, for example, J. J. Holland "demonstrated his skill as a machinist [for Cinderella] arranging the transformations of mice to horses, pumpkin to carriage, etc. . . ." Or as one contemporary reported, "the clouds in which Hymen and the Cupids ascend and descend, have a very fine



Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia.

effect," while another remarked that "We never saw anything more costly, or changes that were more cleverly managed."[10]

Yet Holland's scenic design for Adelmorn the Outlaw from 1802 is disappointing. Clifford E. Hamar, after quoting one impressive description of early set design after another, climaxes the lot by quoting the following advertisement for a St. Louis production in 1825:

> In the 1st act . . . GRAND ERUPTION OF MOUNT VESUVIUS. TERRIFIC EXPLOSION!! Forked Lightenings (sic) Rend the Sky! THE BURNING LAVA Impetuously flows down the side of the Mountain, . . . ILLUMINATED!! FENELLA Plunges into the Sea! GRAND DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS[11] . . . .

Having asked how realistic these effects were, Hamar answers by quoting a communication to the St. Louis Republican from 1828, suggesting that those in charge of effects "refrain from exposing themselves to the audience."[12]

In general, however, sets were more mundane; most American theatres had a standard garden, moonlight set, interior, kitchen and exterior street. With different wings, these were made to serve a variety of settings. For example, the Booth Theatre sets for Rip Van Winkle, dated 1873, call for the "Lady of Lyons" kitchen in Act III, sc. 5.[13]

While the Freeman's home was certainly not rustic, the elegant town house interior was probably similarly all-purpose.

We simply don't know what the set of The Lion of the West looked like. It probably used one stock interior backdrop with wings and another stock garden exterior. Students wishing to perform scenes in class would do well to use only the props called for in the action and leave the rest to the audience's imagination.

Acting Out A Scene

An obvious meaning of the word play is to play-act and we'd like to suggest that you stage some of these scenes in your classroom. You might do the party scene with a large cast, appropriate music and action. Or try the beginning of Act II until Mrs. Wollope's collapse. As both of these depend on large casts and rapid movement, they are difficult to imagine and work very well. Last you might try the initial meeting between Nimrod and Mrs. Wollope, being inventive in displaying your contrasting views on manners. You might even want to improvise, updating the scene, demonstrating how you'd behave to show off your Americanisms to an impressionable foreign visitor.

However you choose to enact these scenes, we hope the preceding articles on theatrical matters will have proven helpful to you.

All the plays in this series are significant examples of culture at play in another sense, however--that of play in a joint. It fits, but there's some give in it. Plays are constructs in the real world while simultaneously creating a fictive one. In the theatre, we pretend, but we take the pretense seriously, at least provisionally, so that we can try out our assumptions about how we see ourselves and others. Paulding and Hackett were trying out their assumptions here, found that audiences appreciated them, and Nimrod Wildfire was born.

In our next section, we will deal with the play from several historical perspectives. Perhaps when you know more about Davy Crockett and Frances Trollope, you will find this fictive encounter between such colorful representatives of contrasting cultures thought provoking.

American Life in Another Time: Primary and Secondary Resource Materials

Davy Crockett, the Man

Florence Polatnick

Courtesy of The New York Historical Society, New York City

DAVID CROCKETT

Watercolor portrait by Ambrose Lisle DeRose

In dealing with Davy Crockett, the historian has difficulty assaying in what proportion the gold nugget of fact has become alloyed with braggadocio, nationalistic propaganda, political image-making, and myth-building. Although Crockett authorship is claimed for a number of books, all were ghost-written. In only one, his autobiography[1] did he have a major part. There are many contemporary accounts of our hero and subsequent accounts of his impact on historical events and the national self-image, but little consensus. Was he "vain, ignorant, simple minded,"[2] a charlatan, a phony? Or was he indeed a free son of the untamed wilderness, a naive but shrewd actor and commentator on the American scene, and a steadfast champion of the common man on the Western frontier?

Davy Crockett was born in 1786 in a log cabin in northeastern Tennessee, the son of a tavern-keeper who had fought in the Revolutionary War. Enrolled in school at the age of 13, Davy cut out after five days. To escape the inevitable beating from his father, the lad ran away. He helped herd cattle, drove a wagon, and worked for a succession of farmers. Crockett matured in a society where men drank hard, swore exuberantly, bet heavily, and boasted of their adventures in picturesque language. He was one of a new breed with few ties to Europe and the older colonies on the Atlantic Ocean. Their psyches were shaped by the dark trackless forests in which lurked hostile Indians and ravenous wild beasts, by the mighty rivers against which puny man pitted his strength and wit, by the hard soil which grudgingly yielded up its fruits, and by the unpredictable whims of Nature. Here muscle power was valued more than logical thought, quick responses more than serious reflection, and the ability to handle a rifle and an axe more than pedigree and academic credentials.

Nevertheless, love sent Davy back to school. At the age of 18 he had decided it was time to get married. Twice his suit had been spurned in favor of men whose only superior virtue, as he perceived it, was education. Consequently, he arranged to attend a Quaker school four days a week, working for the teacher two days in order to pay for his board and tuition."...I learned to read a little in my primer, to write my own name, and to cypher some..."[3] This was all the schooling he would ever have, for six months later he found a willing girl and was quickly married.

There is a curious lacuna in the literature regarding Crockett's family life. Perhaps it was because there was not much to tell. Crockett was a passionate participant in the national and local issues of his day and was often away from home.

He volunteered for Andrew Jackson's 1813-14 campaign against the Creek Indians which broke the military power of the "Red Sticks," deprived the British of an important ally in the War of 1812, and subsequently opened Alabama to settlement. Jackson won great popularity, which ultimately led to the Presidency, and the short-lived hero-worship of his scout, Davy Crockett.

Shortly after Crockett's return, his wife Polly died, leaving two sons, and an infant daughter. About a year later he married Elizabeth Patton, a young widow with two children.

Unsuccessful as a farmer, trapper, trader, or land speculator, Crockett moved to southern Tennessee and joined those backwoods "coonskin apostles of liberty and equality"[4] who had transformed Jeffersonian idealism into practical Jacksonian politics. He became a colonel in the militia and was drafted by his peers to serve as justice of the peace.

In 1821 he was elected to the state legislature and two years later, after another move, he was asked by his new constituency to represent them. Court records show that Davy financed his campaign by hunting wolves to collect the $3 bounty.

He worked vigorously to give the western frontier equal representation in the capitol, to improve navigation on the rivers, and to support iron works and other infant industries. He sponsored bills to help widows and orphans and to provide tax relief and easier treatment of debtors.

Furthermore, there was the question of cheap land, a problem that was to be Crockett's major concern for the rest of his life and which ultimately led to his political downfall and indirectly to his death. North Carolina had distributed land warrants to benefit Revolutionary War veterans and also to redeem the Specie Certificates it had issued to pay for the war. In 1789 North Carolina offered the Federal Government territory which would become the state of Tennessee with the proviso that all the warrants would be satisfied by land in the new state. Congress set aside about 3/4 of the territory for this purpose, the western part of Tennessee to be reserved as public lands. Unfortunately, the eastern part was not large enough to fill all of the claims. There was widespread fraud--using names of deceased veterans, pre-dating, speculation. Inaccurate and inadequate records added to the mess. A man who had used his warrant to obtain a parcel of land and build a home and improvements could be bumped by someone holding a warrant with an earlier date.

Another obvious injustice was that all land was taxed equally, regardless of its worth. This fell heavily on the frontiersman who had to tame the wilderness before it could become productive and who did not have the benefit of a developed infrastructure to support his economic activities. Squatters on public land

were the most frequent victims of these legal injustices, and these were the constituents for whom Davy Crockett fought.

Crockett ran for Congress in 1825 and was defeated, but two years later he tried again and was elected. There are many hilarious stories about his stump-speaking at camp meetings, turkey shoots, squirrel hunts, "frolics," "stomp-downs," and barbecues. Entertainment on the frontier was sparse, and Davy put on a good show. On one occasion he insisted on speaking first. He had memorized his opponent's remarks, delivered them eloquently, and left the man literally speechless.

Another time Davy's constituents let him know that they could not continue to listen on "such a dry subject as the welfare of the nation" until they had something to drink. The bartender insisted on cash on the barrelhead. "Ready money in the west in those times, was the shyest thing in all nature, and it was most particularly shy with me," Crockett recalled. He went into the woods with his trusty rifle Betsy, shot a racoon, and offered its skin in payment for a quart of rum. His constituents once more flocked around him, cheering, shouting his praises. They listened for a while, but then demanded more refreshment. Davy found the coonskin had been carelessly tucked between the logs that supported the bar. He covertly pulled it out and offered it as payment for another bottle. Every time the voters became too dry to listen, Davy pulled the same trick on the unsuspecting bartender. "The joke secured me my election, for it soon circulated like smoke among my constituents, and they allowed . . . that the man who could get the whip hand of Job Snelling in fair trade, could outwit Old Nick himself, and was the real grit for them in Congress." Amidst the exaggerations, the picturesque language, and the racy backwoods humor, Crockett philosophized, "Popularity sometimes depends on a very small matter indeed; in this particular it was worth a quart of New England rum, and no more."

According to the legend, he whirled into Washington boasting, "I'm that same David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey locust; can whip my weight in wild-cats--and if any gentleman pleases, for a ten-dollar bill, he may throw in a panther--hug a bear too close for comfort, and eat any man opposed to Jackson."[6]

Notwithstanding, Crockett's record in three terms in Congress is unimpressive. Harriet Martineau, an English observer of the Washington scene, wrote of the range of "members of Congress, from Clay and Webster down to Davy Crockett . . ."[7] Parrington sums up: " . . . in four years loafing and boasting at the Congressional bar (he) had achieved some distinction as a picturesque original with the tongue of a wag."[8]

The actual record is not quite so dismal. His first act was to petition a mail route for his district. He insisted that the Revolutionary War pension bill must include volunteers and militiamen as well as the regular army. A lingering hatred of army "brass" remaining from his Creek War experiences led Crockett to vote for an investigation and later abolishment of West Point, in his opinion, a citadel of the rich and privileged. He opposed Jackson's "spoils system" and spoke out against excessive government expenditures.

Along with the other Jacksonians Crockett resented John Quincy Adams's deal with Henry Clay's Whigs which deprived "Old Hickory" of the Presidency in 1824, although he had received the largest number of popular votes. Crockett voted against the 1828 "Tariff of Abominations." In The Lion of the West Paulding seems to inject this issue into the dialogue with no purpose other than to call forth another flamboyant speech by Wildfire. Actually, the subject was very much on people's minds in 1831.

Just as the Americans had to fight for their political independence and were fighting a war of words for their cultural independence, so they were also battling for economic independence. The tariff was a weapon in that war, but different sections of the country differed on strategy.

During the period between the Revolution and the War of 1812, the fledgling U. S. A. tried desperately to avoid the European conflagrations by enacting such extreme measures as the Embargo and the Non-Intercourse Acts. Cut off from trade with the continent, Americans began to manufacture many heretofore imported items. With the return to normalcy, England dumped exports at cut prices in an effort to kill the infant American industries and recapture the market. The nation responded by passing the protective tariff of 1816, which raised the price of British imports above the American cost of production, the tax providing revenue for the government. However, when industry failed to develop as expected in the South, John C. Calhoun and other Southern leaders switched their position. They protested that the South was in effect subsidizing the Northern manufacturers' goods and suffering retaliatory measures against their raw materials exports to England. This bitter dispute resulted in a serious challenge to the Union--the South Carolina Nullification Act, which claimed a state's rights were sovereign and that it could disregard federal legislation.

Another hot issue was Davy Crockett's pet cause--cheap land. On his third day the new Congressman introduced the Tennessee Vacant Land Bill. The state held large areas, under the provisions of the Old Northwest Ordinance, to be sold for educational purposes. Crockett argued that land should be given to those who had cleared it and built on it. He knew that most squatters could not afford to bid at auction for the land they already occupied, and the improvements they had made would only raise the price. A land survey was required by law. In the past surveyors had charged outrageous prices and then taken the land in lieu of the unpaid fee. Furthermore, Crockett pointed out, most of his people would never have use colleges to be built in the eastern part of the state. Crockett assailed "State speculation" in land and warned of a "swindling machine."

Thus he was inevitably thrown into conflict with the political power that centered in the mature settlements of eastern Tennessee. The "enemy" were plantation-owning aristocrats, men like Pres. Andrew Jackson and his speculator/businessmen friends. "The rich require but little legislation. We should at least occasionally legislate for the poor," Crockett declared.[10] In a private letter, James K. Polk, Crockett's Congressional colleague, a Jackson stalwart and a future President, complained that Adams's men were using Crockett. "We can't trust him an inch."[11]

Crockett later came into further conflict

with Jackson over curbing the powers of the privately-owned Bank of the U. S. to expand or contract the economy by printing money. Debt-ridden Davy and his farmers wanted a cheap money policy so that they could pay back their loans in inflation-debased dollars.

About this time the Whig Party, desperately casting about for a picturesque, authentic Westerner who would cut into Jackson's appeal to the "coonskin voters," began to court the disillusioned Congressman from Tennessee. They offered help with his speeches, published larger-than-life accounts of his exploits, praised his honesty and intelligence, and even composed a Davy Crockett march. There are some indications that Paulding's The Lion of the West and The Kentuckian were part of the build-up.

In 1835 the Whigs arranged a triumphant tour of the Northeast. There were meetings and dinners with important businessmen and influential politicians like Daniel Webster. Everywhere Davy went, crowds gathered to applaud his speeches enthusiastically. He was overwhelmed with gifts, such as a suit of American wool and a dozen cannisters of the best sportsman's gunpowder from Du Pont; there is even evidence of loans from Nicholas Biddle, President of the Bank of the U. S., Jackson's bitter enemy.[12]

The Whig press covered his activities, enthusiastically enlarging on his anecdotes and witty responses. Newspaper and journal clippings became popular books, largely ghost-written, to which Crockett gave his name. "Davy was vastly surprised at his sudden rise to fame. He had never realized how great a man he was; but he accepted it as an agreeable fact and went ahead."[13]

In this atmosphere Davy recanted his opposition to high tariffs. His factory visits convinced him that jobs and national economic independence were at stake. At the same time he affirmed his support for "internal improvements," the foundation of the Whig platform. Jackson had attacked internal improvements as "pork barrel" legislation catering to sectional interests, but Crockett knew that frontiersmen, as well as Northeastern businessmen, needed roads, canals, rivers made navigable, and the new railroads.

This embracing of the Whig platform is not the "sell-out" it seems. Crockett's central concern was still cheap land. He also believed his constituents would benefit from internal improvements. The latter cost money. Free land would lessen tax revenues. In those days before the income tax, the Federal government had two main sources of income--tariff duties and monies from the sale of public lands. Therefore, realistically, he came out for a high protective tariff which would swell Federal coffers and enable the government to give away land cheaply while paying for internal improvements.

He defiantly made a final break with the President: "Look at my neck," he said, as he had many times before, "you will not find there any collar, with the engraving MY DOG--ANDREW JACKSON."[14] He lent his name to a scurrilous biography of Martin Van Buren, Jackson's hand-picked successor. Yet with all his quixotic individualism in refusing to dance to Jackson's tune, he never seems to have realized that Whig politicians were cynically parading him as a puppet. They used all the means at their disposal to build up the Davy Crockett myth, even as today men like David Garth create political images in slick advertising and public relations campaigns.

In the end his Eastern friends deserted Crockett on the vote for cheap land and dumped him when the voters rejected him as a turncoat. Crockett always maintained that he had remained a Jacksonian; it was Jackson who had betrayed the principles and interests of the frontier. So monomaniacal had he become on the subject that he declared the voters could go to hell and he would go to Texas.

At loose ends, at the age of 49, Crockett put on his old buckskin hunting shirt and coonskin cap, shouldered his rifle, and set out for Texas. Great events were in the offing there, and he obviously hoped the push for Texas independence and its ultimately joining the Union would once more catapult him into a leading role. In February 1836 he selected a new homesite and then hastened off to assist in the defense of the Alamo.

Davy's tragic flaw, the same stubborn individualism which barred compromise, led to his death. A fight between Jacksonians and anti-Jacksonians left Sam Houston with some insubordinate field commanders. Among them was Col. William B. Travis, in charge of the Alamo. Judging the fort to be undefendable, Houston ordered that it be blown up and its forces join him. Travis refused to acknowledge Houston's authority. The 184 defenders of the Alamo were massacred by Santa Anna's troops. There seems to have been ample time to escape or, later, to surrender, but Travis, Jim Bowie, and Crockett chose victory or death. They got both. "Remember the Alamo!" became a rallying cry to unite the Texans and carry them to their ultimate victory over the Mexican forces.

Present-day Americans will find some aspects of Crockett's career unattractive. There are many anti-black jokes and references in his writings and recorded speeches. At various times he owned slaves. Toward Indians he was ruthless. During the Creek War, he said, "We shot them like dogs." In his autobiography he straightforwardly tells of an incident where troops set fire to a house with 46 warriors, and the next day they ate potatoes from the cellar stewed in Indian oil. Perhaps this is not shocking from a man whose grandparents had been killed by Indians, whose one uncle was injured, and another, a deaf-mute, kidnapped and held captive for 20 years. He himself lived on the edge of civilization in constant fear of attack. Nevertheless, he did vote against removal of all Indians to the far side of the Mississippi, but critics have suggested this was a result less of pity than of his unrelenting anti-Jacksonianism.

Conservationists will be offended by the reckless waste of forests and wildlife. Records show that Davy, the prodigious hunter, killed 105 bears in one season. Another time he killed six deer in one day, leaving two hanging in the woods while chasing other game. Unthinkable numbers of turkeys, pigeons, buffalo, and other game vanished before the guns of the hunters, much to the anguish of the Indians, who incorporated a reverence for nature's gifts into their religion.

Fortified by tales of exploits that grew taller with the passage of time, the Davy Crockett myth lived on. In the 1950's the legend became larger than life again. A Davy Crockett hysteria swept the country. The epic stories were resurrected for movies, comic books, newspapers, magazines, and television--and some new ones were created. Children marched with toy rifles singing, "Da-vee,

Da-vee Crockett, king of the wild frontier," Industry churned out a flood of "buckskin" and "homespun" suits and pajamas, coonskin caps, toys, and souvenirs.

In Parrington's evaluation, "Davy was a good deal of a wag, and the best joke he ever played he played upon posterity that has swallowed the myth whole and persists in setting up a romantic halo on his coonskin cap."[15]

Other historians have been kinder. Davy Crockett was an original. He was his own man--courageous, naive perhaps, but true to his fiercely democratic principles. His slogan, "Be always sure you're right--then go ahead!" has inspired many. He opened up a rich vein of American humor later mined by Mark Twain. But more important, he has remained a beloved American figure because his life was intertwined with so many major themes of our past--conquering the wilderness, fighting Indians, sectional interest that inexorably led to the Civil War, the annexation of Texas and Manifest Destiny. He has become the personification of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of the overriding significance of the frontier in American history.

J. K. Paulding

J K Paulding

Selections from James K. Paulding "The American People," published in William I. Paulding, Literary Life of James K. Paulding, New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1867, pp. 341-345.

The inhabitants of what is aptly styled "The Great West" constitute a species of men of a most racy and pecular character . . .

Equally uncorrupted by luxurious indulgence and undebased by abject poverty; equally exempt from the burden of hopeless toil and the temptations of perpetual idleness; equally free from the shackles of despotism and the license of anarchy; equally master of body and mind; accustomed from their youth, and from generation to generation, to a breadth of action and contemplation almost without limit or circumscription;--the faculties of the American People operate on a scale of which the masses of other countries, crimped and cribbed as they are in one little circle of unvaried, unrewarded, labor, can form no conception whatever. The Americans feel that they have subdued a world with the rifle, the axe, and the plough; and the recollection of the past is to them the mirror of the future. . . . The Mississippi boatman as he floats lazily down the stream, as like as not is anticipating the period when he will become commander of a steamboat, member of Congress, or founder of a State.

THE LION OF THE WEST: A TEXT FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

Gerald E. Warshaver

James H. Hackett was an actor who established his reputation as a monologuist who could deliver comic monologues in regional dialect.[1] When he decided he needed a new vehicle for his talents, he induced James Kirke Paulding to send him a dramatic sketch, suggesting to him the title of both the drama and the hero.[2] When the play opened in New York, Hackett had the new role he sought, and America had found herself a new comic symbol of her national identity.[3]

Paulding's Place in American Literature

Hackett's decision to solicit material from Paulding stemmed from the latter's eminence as an author interested in the creation of an original American literature. Paulding had first demonstrated his comic abilities in 1807, when, along with Washington Irving, he coauthored the famous Salmagundi papers, a series of broad but witty articles satirizing the fashionable scenes and dandies of New York.

Paulding distinguished himself in the war of words which American writers fought with their former colonial rulers. Begun at the end of the War of Independence and lasting for over a century, this literary war represented America's war of intellectual independence. Suffering from the ambivalent identity characteristic of intellectuals of newly liberated colonies, American writers felt themselves to be morally superior to the defeated imperial power, but at the same time they saw themselves as culturally inferior--provincial.[4]

English travelers who visited the new nation and returned home to publish negative reports provided Americans with an opportunity to overcome the anxiety which their contradictory self-image produced. Because these patronizing Britons combined hostile criticisms of American cultural achievements with insufferable attacks on republican values, English criticism of American national character, learning, and literature could be attacked as being as illegitimate as was English antagonism toward the principles of democracy.[5] For example, the fault that English visitors found with the alterations and additions that Americans had made in the English language could be read as an attack on national sovereignty. "Every nation," wrote Paulding, "ought to have a dialect at least somewhat distinct from all others, as proof of independence." In fact, he argued, "We shall never be truly independent, I am afraid, till we make our own books, and coin our own words--two things as necessary to national sovereignty as making laws and coining money."[6] In the context of the literary war, Nimrod Wildfire's Americanism "Wake, snakes--June bugs are cummin!" declared our linguistic independence. Wilfire's exfluntified's and catawampus's, his rip staver boasts, his backwoods epithets and half horse, half alligator similes--these coinages proved that just as America had wrested the land from England so had she tetotaciously subdued the mother country's language. The right of Americans to claim

political independence and to govern themselves legitimatized the status of America's own modes of expression and her culture in general.[7]

Paulding Defends the National Character

Paulding defended the national character and democracy of America in five major works and in numerous lesser pieces which he wrote between 1812 and 1825. His major effort in the controversy, John Bull in America, or The New Munchausen (1825), is of interest to the student of The Lion of the West because it offers a broad caricature of the foreign traveler in America, not unlike the portrait of Mrs. Wollope in The Lion of the West. Of similar interest to the student of this play are the phrases which Amos Herold, Paulding's biographer, considers to be "keynotes" of John Bull in America. Herold finds that terms such as "turbulent spirit of democracy," and the "spitting, gouging, drinking, duelling, dirking, swearing, strutting republicans," are put into the mouth of foreign writers to characterize the type of American which Nimrod Wildfire was later meant to represent.[8] Clearly then, by 1830 both the hero Wildfire, and his protagonist Mrs. Wollope (Trollope) were veterans of the battle of words between England and America. In other words, they were stock types, symbolic entities.

English versus American:

(1) National Character & Language

By the time Hackett took the stage as Wildfire, Americans had grown accustomed to satirizing the negative stereotypes of themselves which outsiders held. Seen from a nationalistic perspective, the elements which hostile critics put down as proof of the fallen state of the American national character could be raised up as elements of a unique national identity. The joke in The Lion of the West was that English visitors were unable to recognize the genuine American when they saw him; instead they took an American "original" for an inferior version of themselves.[9] Furthermore, to compound the humor, foreign visitors were shown to be so preoccupied with their own aristocratic prejudices that they misinterpreted other aspects of American culture. How reliable could their criticisms of slavery be if, as is shown in the case of Mrs. Wollope, they addressed a "free gentleman of color" as "my good slave." By the same token, their criticisms of Americans as overly materialistic or as childish primitives reduced to a state of savagery by prolonged contact with a wilderness environment, could be negated by lampooning their frame of reference. This was done by having Jenkins and Mrs. Wollope use laughable classical allusions derived from the dead past of antique civilizations while Nimrod uses homespun, native allusions taken from American nature. For example, Jenkins is made to say "By all the snakes on the head of Medusa" and Mrs. Wollope is shown to declare that Nimrod is a "modern centaur," while the hero, who can quote Shakespeare when he wants to, declares himself to possess the brute strength and natural cunning of both the horse and alligator combined with the elemental power of the earthquake.[10] That Mrs. Wollope misinterprets Wildfire's metaphoric title of "horse" to mean an 'officer of the cavalry' only proves that she is too overcivilized and abstract to understand the American national spirit.[11]

The Tall Tale

Most importantly, this inability to appreciate the true identity of the American genius is underlined by Mrs. Wollope's mistaking Wildfire's tall tale about the hat-in-the-Kentucky-mud for an authentic anecdote. Fact and fiction, truth and falsity are confounded in the tall tale. Its deadpan style of delivery, its artfully heaped up series of "factual" exaggerations, and its protestations of truth make this perennially popular form of American folklore an appropriate emblem for the patronizing outsider's erroneous evaluation of America.[12]

(2) Civilization

In The Lion of the West false belief is consistently portrayed as a feminine characteristic associated with the overcivilized artificiality, essential hypocrisy, and undemocratic standards of the mother country. For example, Mrs. Wollope misinterprets the potential interest that her ameliorating "Academy of refinement at 500 dollars a share" will have for Americans. She is led astray because of her belief in the ethic of ascribed status, the concept that birth and breeding determined a person's place in the civic order. Even American women are not immune to this European disease. The play points out that just as Mrs. Wollope fell for Wildfire's tall tale, so Mrs. Freeman, whose name suggests she should know better, falls for Jenkins' artifice. Corrupted by foreign notions of artifical distinctions, Mrs. Freeman prefers the imposter's noble title to the talents and good nature of Percival. She wishes to better her daughter artificially in the European manner.

(3) The Uncorrupted Intellect

Wildfire is the polar opposite of European refinement. In farcical proportions, he exemplifies the virile belief which, as John William Ward has shown, coalesced around the figure of Andrew Jackson.[13] Wildfire comes from the new-created West where overcivilized refinements have not debilitated his native intelligence. As he informs us, his horse sense tells him that the lettered learning of lawyers makes them all mouth, like catfish.[14] His intellect remains uncorrupted by formal training in logic or the other unnecessary adornments of intellect associated with the effete luxuries of Europe which Mrs. Wollope's proposed academy symbolizes. Therefore, it can be said of Wildfire as it was said of Jackson when he ran for President against Adams that his wisdom was uncorrupted by learning, his Reason by Understanding.[15] His tariff speech proves this. In a burlesque of Jacksonian rhetoric, Wildfire declares that he is a "nursling of the wilds" whose unfettered natural energies and "hearty self-reliance" ("there's no mistake in me") instinctively give him the wisdom to choose the right course.[16] "The material development of nineteenth century America needed a philosophy less than it needed action, but Americans satisfied both needs by developing a philosophy of action," Ward observes.[17] Wildfire's tariff speech is a grotesque enlargment of this primitivistic philosophy. It held that the uncorrupted "heart sees farther than the head." It makes thought subordinate to action.[18]

Nothing could be more illustrative of this

philosophy than the way Wildfire became a Congressman. As a gigantic personification of the ethic of democratic equality, Wildfire literally gets down in the mud with the boatman. His long tale underlines the belief in the "dynamic relation between physical nature and human character" which Ward considers a hallmark of the Jacksonian attitude. And, as Wildfire's introduction to his fight tale makes clear, the point of his narrative is that he proved he was the best man--"the yaller flower of the forest," a true "beauty"--in a fight conducted according to nature's rules. Repudiating the artificial rules of the European gentleman, the half horse, half alligator creed of the west called for every man to make his own way up in the world "Old Mississippi style."[19]

Wildfire's Influence on the Crockett Myth

Historians have correctly noted that the figure of Wildfire suggests the career and reputation of Davy Crockett, the backwoods militia colonel from Tennessee who came to Congress in 1827.

Documentary evidence shows that Paulding had the specific character of Crockett in mind when he composed his play.[20]

While historians and critics have written about the importance of Davy Crockett as a model for Nimrod Wildfire, much less has been said about the contribution Paulding's sketch made to the image of Crockett.[21] Students of the play would do well to follow the lead of the folklorist Joseph Arpad who found that Wildfire's monologue of his fight with the riverboatman was a revised version of a tale Paulding first recorded in his Letters from the South, a work he published in 1817.[22] As Arpad demonstrates, this satire on Jacksonian campaigning became a feature of the Crockett legend. Similarly, Wildfire's tariff speech was also subsequently put into the mouth of Crockett by the builders of the Crockett myth.[23] The contribution the play made to the popular conception of the backwoodsman extends beyond the tales, however. Indeed, as Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill note, "Wildfire's most peculiar phrases had brief histories or no histories at all before 1830, the year of the play."[24] Afterwards, as research will show, they became commonplace expressions of western folk speech.

The Backwoodsman and the American Myth

Crockett, however, is not the only historical figure who ought to be associated with the character of Wildfire. The rhapsody of the backwoodsman pulls us back to the earlier figure of Daniel Boone. Apotheosized as early as 1784 as "the free-lance frontiersman, 'ordained by God to settle the wilderness,'" years before he answered Hackett's advertisement, Boone had struck Paulding as the personification of unleashed American energy.[25] In 1817 Paulding showed he shared in the myth of Daniel Boone by boasting that Boone and his fellow Kentuckians could "march to the north pole and shoot out the wind's eye, if it were no bigger than the point of a needle." This boast, of course, ought to remind us of the type of brag characteristic of the "screamer" played by Hackett.[26] As Richard Slotkin argues in Regeneration Through Violence, by 1833 Americans had come to regard Boone as the archetype of a new species of man--the westerner. "A Nimrod by instinct and physical character," this new type of American according to Timothy Flint's Indian Wars of the West, mixed "wild recklessness" with "high notions of honor and generosity."[27] It is likely, therefore, that in looking for a new role for himself Hackett fused the myth of Boone, the Kentucky Nimrod, with the celebrity of Crockett, the Jacksonian Wildfire. The result was Nimrod Wildfire, not an historical figure but an element in the story which Americans told about themselves in order to give dramatic character to their subjective interpretation of themselves.

In conclusion, this short play covers more ground than may appear at first view. It is historically multidimensional. It moves backwards in time. It lightly sums up an episode which seriously affected the American psyche--the literary war between England and America. Most importantly of all, the concepts with which The Lion of the West deals remain important aspects of American culture. For instance, in the prototypical western novel The Virginian (1902), Owen Wister put the backwoodsman on horseback and brought the oppositions of reason/understanding, nature/civilization, masculine/feminine, and east (Europe)/west (America) onto the plains of Wyoming.[28] Closer to our own day is the case of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Filled with the mythic idealization of the cowboy, highly skilled in the practice of the western tall tale, campaigning in 1964 like "Andy Jackson in a jetliner," Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of The Lion of the West into the White House.[29] If as Clifford Geertz suggests, "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts," then Paulding's little farce is a good source for a closer reading of the American identity. From LBJ to the western heroes we see on television and in the movies, from Mark Twain's characters to the Davy Crokett legends, from the latest English traveler to report on our manners and the state of our republicanism to Mrs. Trollope and her predecessors, from the myth of Daniel Boone to the image of John Wayne, and from 1830 to today, it has been acted and reenacted.[30]

"Heroes or Clowns? Comic Supermen from a Subliterature." Selection from Daniel J. Boorstin The Americans: The National Experience (courtesy of Random House: New York, 1965), pp. 327-334

EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY America offered many obvious features of a Heroic Age--a half-known wilderness where men were threatened by untamed animals and hostile tribes--and it is not surprising that there soon appeared American counterparts of the ancient heroes. But the uncertainties of national boundaries and aspirations and language, and the unsure line between fact and hope, had their counterparts in uncertain boundaries between the heroic and the comic. Our first popular heroes came on the scene to a chorus of horse-laughs.

American humor and American popular heroes were born together. The first popular heroes of the new nation were comic heroes and the first popular humor of the new nation was the antics of its heroic clowns. The comic and the heroic were mixed and combined in novel American proportions. What were the dominant themes of these mock-heroics? What made them comic, and what made them heroic?

The heroic themes are obvious enough and much different from those of other times and places. The Crockett legends, as Richard M. Dorson has explained, repeat the familiar pattern of the Old World heroic story: "the preeminence of a mighty hero whose fame in myth has a tenuous basis in fact; single combats in which he distinguishes himself against dread antagonists both man and beast; vows and boastings; pride of the hero in his weapons, his horse, his dog, his woman; the remarkable birth and precocious strength of the hero; a tragic death in which the invincible but mortal champion is treacherously or unnaturally slain." Achilles, Beowulf, Siegfried, Roland, and King Arthur--each in his own time and place--relived the familar heroic role. *** *** ***

In a world full of the unexpected, where all norms were vaguely or extravagantly defined, readers of the Crockett legends were never quite certain whether to laugh or to applaud, whether what they saw and heard was wonderful, awful or ridiculous. "May be," wrote Crockett, "you'll laugh at me, and not at my book." In a more fully explored, better known, more predictable world, they would have been more certain of the meaning of what they saw and of the reactions they should express. Crockett's boastings were not entirely distinguishable from the honest optimism of the booster, from the blatant lies of the land-promoter, or from the common hopefulness of the transient. Even today, when we are fascinated by the spectacle of the American superman of that age, we are seldom sure why. Are we admiring the beautiful, the grand, the big, or the ugly? . . .

The vastness and variety and freshness of the American landscape, of its flora and fauna, of custom and costume, nourished American subliterature . . . It is only a half-truth, therefore, to speak of American humor and American heroics in this period as "regional." . . . Their wider comic and heroic appeal, and their place as national legend, finally came from the fact that there was a large audience of fellow Americans remote from these scenes that was eager for entertainment and for sagas to dramatize the distinctive appeal and grandeur of their whole country. Regional distinctions themselves thus made possible a flourishing national subliterature.

Compare the above portrait of Mrs. Trollope from her Domestic Manners to the caricature of "The Trollope family," from America as Art. p. 23.

MRS. TROLLOPE

Mrs. Trollope set out for American with three of her five children to retrieve the family fortunes, when her husband's financial difficulties grew to alarming proportions. Like many other English people, she had heard encouraging stories about this country from a friend with whom she first settled, but when that situation proved unpropitious, she headed for Cincinnati (the Dallas of its day) with the intention of opening a fancy department store which would specialize in imported fineries.

Despite her qualities of enterprise and imagination, she was a poor business woman. She planned too grandiose a building, was cheated by local contractors, and when the department store finally opened, she had to declare bankruptcy and allow the goods her husband had shipped to her to be possessed as partial payment of her debts.

Meanwhile, she had conceived the plan to write her book of observations. To this end, she travelled widely in this country, spoke to as many people as she could, and took copious notes of her impressions.

She, and the book she wrote, became overnight sensations on both sides of the Atlantic upon its publication. Encouraged by this success, she continued her career as a writer of both travel books and novels, producing over thirty works in the next twenty years and encouraging her son, Anthony, in his career as novelist.

Although the English made fun of her as did the Americans, modern readers tend to take a more sympathetic view of this woman, who supported her family by her wit and industry, and whose remarks about this country show a shrewd intelligence and honest analytic powers.

Selections from Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, ed. Donald Smalley (courtesy of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949)

"Treatment of Indians" (pp. 221-22)

We were at Washington at the time that the measure for chasing the last of several tribes of Indians from their forest homes was... decided upon... If the American character may be judged by their conduct in this matter, they are most lamentably deficient in every feeling

of honour and integrity...treacherous and false almost beyond belief in their intercourse with the unhappy Indians. . . . It is impossible for any mind of common honesty not to be revolted by the contradictions in their principles and practice. ... [Y]ou will see them with one hand hoisting the cap of liberty, and with the other flogging their slaves. You will see them one hour lecturing their mob on the indefeasible rights of man, and the next driving from their homes the children of the soil, whom they have bound themselves to protect by the most solemn treaties.

"Young Girls and Young Marriages" (p. 118)

...Even the young girls, though often with lovely features, look pale, thin, and haggard.... The horror of domestic service, which the reality of slavery, and the fable of equality, have generated, excludes the young women from that sure and most comfortable resource of decent English girls; and the consequence is, that with a most irreverend freedom of manner to the parents, the daughters are, to the full extent of the word, domestic slaves. This condition, which no periodical merrymaking, no village fete, ever occurs to cheer, is only changed for the still sadder burdens of a teeming wife. . . . The slender, childish thing, without vigour of mind or body, is made to stem a sea of troubles that dims her young eye and makes her cheek grow pale, even before nature has given it the last beautiful finish of the full-grown woman.

"We shall get along," is the answer in full, for all that can be said in way of advice to a boy and girl who take it into their heads to go before a magistrate and "get married." And they do get along, till sickness overtakes them, and where this happens, they are completely without resource.

"Equality" (pp. 120-21)

Any man's son may become the equal of any other man's son, and the consciousness of this is certainly a spur to exertion; on the other hand, it is also a spur to that coarse familiarity, untempered by any shadow of respect, which is assumed by the grossest and the lowest in their intercourse with the highest and most refined. This is a positive evil, and, I think, more than balances its advantages.

. . . The theory of equality may be very daintily discussed by English gentlemen in a London dining-room, when the servant, having placed a fresh bottle of cool wine on the table, respectfully shuts the door, and leaves them to their walnuts and their widom; but it will be found less palatable when it presents itself in the shape of a hard, greasy paw, and is claimed in accents that breathe less of freedom than of onions and whiskey. Strong, indeed, must be the love of equality in an English breast if it can survive a tour through the Union.

"Treatment of Slaves" (p. 247)

...[Slavery's] effects on the moral feelings and external manners . . . are unquestionably most injurious. The same man who beards his wealthier and more educated neighbour with the bullying boast, "I'm as good as you," turns to his slave, and knocks him down, if the furrow he has ploughed, or the log he has felled, please not this stickler for equality. There is a glaring falsehood on the very surface of such a man's principles that is revolting. It is not among the higher classes that the possession of slaves produces the worst effects. Among the poorer class of landholders, who are often as profoundly ignorant as the negroes they own, the effect of this plenary power over males and females is most demoralising; and the kind of coarse, not to say brutal, authority which is exercised, furnishes the most disgusting moral spectacle I ever witnessed.

"Theatres" (pp. 339-40)

There are three theatres at New York, all of which we visited. The Park Theatre is the only one licensed by fashion, but the Bowery is infinitely superior in beauty; it is indeed as pretty a theatre as I ever entered, perfect as to size and proportion, elegantly decorated, and the scenery and machinery equal to any in London,...it requires some courage to decide upon going [to the Chatham]; nor do I think my curiosity would have penetrated so far, had I not seen Miss Mitford's Rienzi advertised there.... [In] spite of very indifferent acting, I was delighted. The interest must have been great, for till the curtain fell, I saw not one quarter of the queer things around me: then I observed in the front row of a dressbox a lady performing the most maternal office possible; several gentlemen without their coats, and a general air of contempt for the decencies of life, certainly more than usually revolting.

"Money" (p. 301)

Nothing can exceed their activity and perseverance in all kinds of speculation, handicraft, and enterprise, which promises a profitable pecuniary result. I heard an Englishman, who had been long resident in America, declare that... he had never overheard Americans conversing without the word DOLLAR being pronounced between them. Such unity of purpose, such sympathy of feeling, can, I believe, be found nowhere else, except, perhaps, in an ants' nest. The result is exactly what might be anticipated. This sordid object, for ever before their eyes, must inevitably produce a sordid tone of mind, and, worse still, it produces a seared and blunted conscience on all questions of probity.

"Treatment of Women" (pp. 156-57)

In America, with the exception of dancing, which is almost wholly confined to the unmarried of both sexes, all the enjoyment of the men are found in the absence of the women...Were it not that such is the custom, it is impossible but that they would have ingenuity enough to find some expedient for sparing the wives and daughters of the opulent the sordid offices of household drudgery which they almost all perform in their families. Even in the slave states, though they may not clear-starch and iron, mix puddings and cakes one-half of the day, and watch them baking the other half, still the very highest occupy themselves in their household concerns, in a manner that precludes the possibility of their becoming elegant and enlightened companions. In Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, I met with some exceptions to this; but speaking of the country generally, it is unquestionably true.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Values:

1. What moral and cultural values of the various characters in the play conflict?
2. What values do you think Paulding was implying through the play?
3. In what ways does Paulding make some of the characters seem ridiculous and in what ways not?
4. In what ways do we, as a modern audience with different attitudes toward women and blacks, view the play's treatment of Mrs. Wollope? of Caesar? of Nimrod? of the Freemans?
5. What do you think were the values of the original audience, and how do these compare with our own?
6. Why did Davy Crockett encourage the rumor that Nimrod was modelled on him?
7. Why was the play a big hit in New York and London but disliked out West?
8. What was the societal effect, so far as we can tell, of this play's success?
9. Compare the treatment of the western hero in this play to that in Arthur Kopit's Indians and John Bishop's The Great Grandson of Jedediah Kohler. (In the latter play, the modern descendant of the mythic western hero, Jedediah Kohler, says of his ancester, "But he was on the wrong side!" What do you think this means?)
10. What kind of a mythic hero is Nimrod?
11. How would a mythic western hero you might invent differ from Nimrod Wildfire?

Structure:

1. In what ways is the play representative of nineteenth century comedy? In what respects is it a genuine original?
2. What can you learn about the nineteenth century theatre by comparing the plots of the play's three versions?
3. Can you compare this play to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night? How?
4. Show how the language used by the principals helps to characterize them.
5. In dramatic theory, characters in similar positions whose personalities are contrasted by the dramatist are called "dramatic foils." (The term is derived from fencing.) Which characters serve as foils to which others?
6. How does Bernard relate the main plot to the subplot?
7. Why do we never worry about the possibility of Jenkins being killed in the duel?

Production:

1. In your imagination how did you cast the characters?
2. The play calls for two quite spectacular scenes--the party, and the duel-kidnapping scene which are difficult technically to execute. How would you stage those scenes?
3. After reading the play, what do you think is the basis for Nimrod's "mis-reading" of Mrs. Wollope's letter?
4. If you could pick any well-known actors for the parts, how would you cast this play? costume it? stage it?
5. How much of the humor comes from the divergent accents? Try the dialogue with and without, and see.

Caricature of the Trollope family and friend from America As Art. See portrait on p. 21.

Americans: Then and Now:

1. Would Mrs. Wollope's Academy have fulfilled a need in America?
2. Why do you think Mrs. Wollope/Trollope was so devastatingly negative about life in the U. S. A.? Assess the validity of her views.
3. Mrs. Freeman terms Wildfire "a savage." Do you agree?
4. As a Congressman, Nimrod Wildfire had been exposed to the civilizing influence of Washington society, yet he retains the speech and manners of a raw frontiersman. Why?
5. Compare Mrs. Trollope's view of America with those of two French observers of approximately the same period--J. H. St. John Crevecoeur and Alexis de Tocqueville. Also with the later writings of Charles Dickens and her own son Anthony Trollope.
6. Describe the plot of a novel entitled James N. Tidwell, Detective.
7. Why did the Whigs cultivate Davy Crockett and shape his legend?
8. Why is there so much disagreement about the true character of Davy Crockett?
9. Compare today's election campaign procedures with those of Davy Crockett's times.
10. The frontier in the play is Kentucky. How was the concept of it changed in American thought?
11. The tariff question continues to be an important issue. Today the American auto, electronics, steel, and other industries protest Japanese imports; shoe manufacturers demand action against Brazil, Italy, and Taiwan; the clothing industry cites its losses because of foreign competition. Should a tax be placed on imports to protect domestic producers? Should certain industries be protected in the interests of national defense and welfare?
12. Do you think political imagemaking is easier today than it was in the 1830's? Can you give modern examples of manipulation by the press of a public figure?
13. Could you tell the story of Davy Crockett from his wife's point-of-view?
14. How is the cheap money question being resolved today?
15. Does Nimrod Wildfire/Davy Crockett fit your idea of the quintessential American?

Notes:

Yankee Theatre

[1] See Francis Hodge, Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825-1850 (Austin, 1964).

Dramatic Form

[1] Joseph Donohue, Theatre in the Age of Kean (Totowa, 1975), p. 18.

[2] Donohue, p. 129.

[3] "Biography of a Lost Play," The Theatre Annual (Vol. 7, 1954), 58.

[4] See "The Rise of Melodrama" in Donohue, pp. 105-127.

[5] See article by Wareshaver and selection from Booretin, pp. 17-19, Sourcebook.

Production History

[1] Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, November 21, 1831.

[2] E. T. Coke, A Subaltern's Furlough, (New York, 1833) I, 15.

[3] Hodge, 55.

[4] Hodge, 57.

[5] Hodge, 60.

[6] Hodge, 60-1.

[7] Coke, I, 25.

The Players: Hackett:

[1] n.a., "The Drama," The Albion, April 25, 1846, Robinson Locke Collection, Vol. 58, Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts, N. Y. P. L.

[2] "Memories of Players of Other Days," Robinson Locke, Vol. 258.

[3] George C. C. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (New York, 1928), III, p. 501-2.

[4] See editor's introduction in volume of The Lion of the West for the story of the play's recovery.

Wheatley & Gibbs:

[1] George C. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (New York, 1928), III, p. 657.

[2] Odell, III, p. 661.

[3] Robert Gould Shaw, Exhibition: Prints, Playbills, Advertisement and Autograph Letters to Illustrate the History of the Boston Stage from 1791-1835 (Boston, n.d. 1914?), Lincoln Center, N. Y. P. L.

[4] London National Standard as quoted in the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, May 1, 1833.

[5] "Mrs. Gibbs--Afterwards Mrs. Coleman," Bon Bella, n.a., n.d., Clipping file, L. C., N. Y. P. L.

Scenic Design

[1] Clifford E. Hamar, "Scenery on the Early American Stage," Theatre Annual, 7 (1948-49), 86.

[2] Hamar, 87.

[3] See "Theatere," enclosed.

[4] H. Barton Baker, The London Stage: Its History and Traditions from 1576-1888 (London, 1889) I, 98.

[5] quoted without source in Ian Jack, English Literature 1815-1832 (Oxford, 1963), p. 177.

[6] Life of Gerald Griffin as quoted in Jack, p. 178.

[7] Hamar, 84.

[8] Oscar Brockett, The Theatre: An Introduction (New York, 1974), 3rd ed. p. 274.

[9] Hamar, pp. 84-100.

[10] Richard Stoddard, "Notes on John Joseph Holland with a Design for the Baltimore Theatre, 1802," Theatre Survey, XII (May, 1971), 62.

[11] Hamar, 100.

[12] from William G. B. Carson, The Theatre on the Frontier: The Early Years of the St. Louis Stage (Chicago, 1932), p. 22.

[13] Booth Theatre, Theatre in America, Lincoln Center, N. Y. P. L.

Davy Crockett

[1] A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee, E. L. Carey and A. Hart, Philadelphia, 1834.

[2] Parrington, Vernon L., Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. 2, Harcourt Brace and Co., N. Y. 1927, p. 178.

[3] Narrative, op. cit., Ch. 3.

[4] Parrington, op. cit., p. 137.

[5] Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas, T. K. and P. G. Collins, Philadelphia 1836, Ch. 1.

[6] Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett of Western Tennessee, J. and J. Harper, N. Y., 1833, Ch. XIII.

[7] A Retrospect of Western Travel, Saunders and Otley, London, 1838, Vol. I, pp. 144-6.

[8] Op. cit., p. 178.

[9] Shackford, James Atkins, David Crockett, the Man and the Legend, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1956, p. 96.

[10] Congressional Debates, IV, 2518-9.

[11] Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[12] Shackford, op. cit., p. 171.

[13] Parrington, op. cit., p. 175.

[14] Wallace Brockway and Bart Keith Winer, eds., Homespun America, Simon and Schuster, N. Y., 1950, p. 68.

[15] Op. cit., p. 179.

The Lion of the West: A Text for National Identity

[1] For an account of the Yankee character and Hackett's career, see Francis Hodge, Yankee Theatre (Austin, 1964). Walter Blair, "'A Man a Voice Speaking': A Continuum in American Humor," in Veins of Humor, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 179-204, offers a fine review of the extent to which "the comic narrative modeled upon the oral tale" has persistently been a feature of American humor. Valuable perspective on The Lion of the West can be gained by reading Constance Rourke, American Humor: A Study of the National Character (New York: 1931) and Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill, America's Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury (New York: 1978), especially pp. 92-151.

[2] William I. Paulding, Literary Life of James K. Paulding (New York, 1867), p. 218.

[3] F. Donald Smalley, Introd., Domestic Manners of the Americans, by Frances Trollope (New York, 1949), p. ix.

[4] For a sociological analysis of the problems the United States faced in establishing a national identity, see Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective (Garden City, N. Y., 1963), Ch. 2; for the role of the intellectuals, see pp. 75-85. Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality; An American Literary Campaign (Syracuse, 1957) provides a comprehensive study of literary nationalism. Key documents of the movement can be found in Robert E. Spiller, ed., The American Literary Revolution (Garden City, N. Y., 1967; rpt. New York, 1969). For Paulding's role, see Amos L. Herold, James Kirke Paulding, Versatile American (New York, 1926); Ch. 4, "Defender of the United States," pp. 46-65.

[5] Jane Louise Mesick, The English Traveller in America, 1785-1835 (New York, 1922), summarizes the writings of the visitors mentioned in her title. For an historical exposition of the paradoxical tendencies and cultural biformities which distinguish American national character, culture, and style, see Michael Kammen, People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization (New York, 1972).

[6] Lemuel Lengthy [James Kirke Paulding], "Americanisms," Analectic Magazine, May 1814, pp. 404-9.

[7] For a description of the Americanisms Paulding might have had in mind, see H. L. Mencken, The American Language, Supplement One (New York, 1945), pp. 1-150. Frontier coinages of the type uttered by Nimrod Wildfire are discussed in Mody C. Boatright, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), pp. 146-158. In Appendix A (pp. 427-8) of his edition, Smalley supplies a list of the American phrases which Frances Trollope recorded in her notebook. A lengthy poetic rendition of a wide range of Americanisms and American vernacular rhetoric can be found in Carl Sandburg's The People, Yes (New York, 1936).

[8] Herold, p. 62-4.

[9] Joseph J. Arpad, "John Wesley Jarvis, James Kirk Paulding and Colonel Nimrod Wildfire," New York Folklore Quarterly, 21 (1965), 105, considers the true significance of The Lion of the West to be "the elevation of the original to the status of hero." Arpad, p. 104, defines an "original":

> His behavior was conventional but his character--what he himself professed to be--was quite unconventional and unorthodox. He was unique, the first of his kind--or so he claimed, and with naive Adamic innocence he styled himself master of all he surveyed.

For a fine discussion of the literary implications of this concept, see R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, 1955).

[10] Kammen, p. 255; also Arthur K. Moore, The Frontier Mind: A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman (Lexington, Ky., 1957), pp. 107, 114, 116.

[11] The fur trappers of the Rocky Mountains, the mountain men, who flourished between 1810 and 1840, developed animal epithets such as "horse" into a language all their own. A good primary source is George Frederick Ruxton, Life in the Far West (New York, 1849). "Hoss" Cartwright of TV's Bonanza does not represent a domesticated Wildfire; his Scandinavian mother nicknamed him hoss, Norwegian for "good luck," according to Alex Mahail, Total Television (New York, 1980), p. 105.

[12] Brunhilde Biebuyck-Goetz, "This Is the Dying Truth': Mechanisms of Lying," Journal of the Folklore Institute, 14 (1977), 80; Blair and Hill, p. 112, Barre Toelken, The Dynamics of Folklore (Boston, 1979), p. 112. For a study of the hat-in-the-mud tale's appearance in print and in oral tradition between 1797 and 1958, see John Q. Anderson, "Some Migratory Anecdotes in American Folk Humor," Mississippi Quarterly, 25 (1972), 447-57. A useful outline of the folktale genre to which the tall tale belongs is Jan H. Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (New York, 1978), Ch. 9.

[13] John William Ward, Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age (New York, 1955).

[14] "Horse sense is the same thing as common sense, homespun philosophy, pawkiness, cracker-box philosophy, gumption, or mother-wit," opines Walter Blair, Horse Sense in American Humor, From Benjamin Franklin to Ogden Nash (New York, 1942), p. vi.

[15] Ward, p. 68.

[16] "Behold, then, the unlettered man of the West, the nursling of the wilds...": George Bancroft in his "Eulogy" of Jackson cited in Ward, p. 73; for comments on the doctrine of "hearty self-reliance," see Ward, pp. 170-1.

[17] Ward, p. 78.

[18] "It is the heart that inspires the intellect...The heart sees farther than the head.": Hugh A. Garland in his "Eulogy" of Jackson cited in Ward, p. 78. The philosophy of Jacksonianism is placed within the history of American anti-intellectualism by Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York, 1963), pp. 155-171.

[19] See Ward, Ch. 9, "The Self-made Man." Wildfire's fight story satirizes descriptions of "rough and tumble" combat regularly included in English travel books. Thomas Ashe's classical description of such a fight first published in his Travels in America, Performed in the Year 1806 (London, 1809), pp. 88-89, is partially quoted by Boatright, pp. 8-9.

[20] Ralph M. Aderman, ed., The Letters of James Kirke Paulding (Madison, 1962), p. 113.

[21] For Crockett's biography, see Constance Rourke, Davy Crockett (New York, 1934) and James Atkins Shackford, David Crockett, the Man and the Legend (Chapel Hill, 1956). Blair, Horse Sense, pp. 24-50 examines the varied images of Crockett. The tale tale tradition which collected around him can be studied in Richard M. Dorson, ed., Davy Crockett: American Comic Legend (New York, 1939) and in Dorson's American Folklore (Chicago, 1959) and America in Legend: Folklore from the Colonial Period to the Present (New York, 1973). Also of value are Dixon Wecter, The Hero in America (New York, 1941) and the interpretations found in Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Middletown, Conn., 1973) and in Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), II, 172-9.

[22] Joseph J. Arpad, "John Wesley Jarvis, James Kirke Paulding, and Colonel Nimrod Wildfire," New York Folklore Quarterly, 21 (1965), 92-106, and "The Fight Story: Quotation and Originality in Native American Humor," Journal of the Folklore Institute, 10 (1973), 141-72.

[23] Blair and Hamlin, pp. 111-2.

[24] Above, p. 109.

[25] Wecter, p. 183. An insightful analysis of the mythologizing of Boone in John Filson's The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky (1784) is found in Slotkin, Ch. 3.

[26] Paulding, Letters from the South, Written during an Excursion in the Summer of 1816 (New York, 1817), I, 199. On the frontier boast, see Boatright, pp. 24-38.

[27] Timothy Flint, Indian Wars of the West (Cincinnati, 1833), p. 53, quoted in Slotkin, p. 422. See also the treatment of Boone in Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950; reissued Cambridge, 1970).

[28] For an explanation of how Wister both presents and avoids these cultural oppositions, see Donald E. Houghton, "Two Heroes in One: Reflections Upon the Popularity of The Virginian," Journal of Popular Culture, 4 (1970), 497-508.

[29] Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream (New York, 1976), pp. 33, 429 n. 33, 9, 215, and passim.

[30] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," Daedalus, Winter 1972, p. 29.

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GLOSSARY

Note on "backwoods lingo" in The Lion of the West.

Tall talk is language that makes a noise: it's intensive and extravagant. "To the freedoms they already enjoyed," observes Mody Boatright in Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), p. 146. "the folk of the West added another—the freedom to use language freely." The Lion of the West contains several examples of the "free speech" of the frontier movement. These terms, like other lawless coinages of backwoods slang, had some basis in western usages. However, writers who popularized the figure of the backwoodsman for eastern audiences most likely built upon western usage. The Nimrod Wildfires and Davy Crocketts of stage and the comic press spoke an extra thick version of the backwoods lingo in order to intensify and exaggerate the social distance between themselves and their eastern audiences.

The following coinages appear in The Lion of the West:

catawampus: a term associated with terror and mayhem.

tetotaciously exfluctified: totally crushed, demolished, or beaten.

sogdolloger or socdologer: a fierce sock or a terrible wallop.

jubus: a variation of juberous, dubious, doubtful.

. . . Were the words in these stories really words? Gullywhumping, slantendicler, discomboberate, absquatulate, homogification, circumbustifikashun, flutterbation. Elegancies? Illiteracies? How much of at all was a hoax?

Daniel J. Boorstin

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